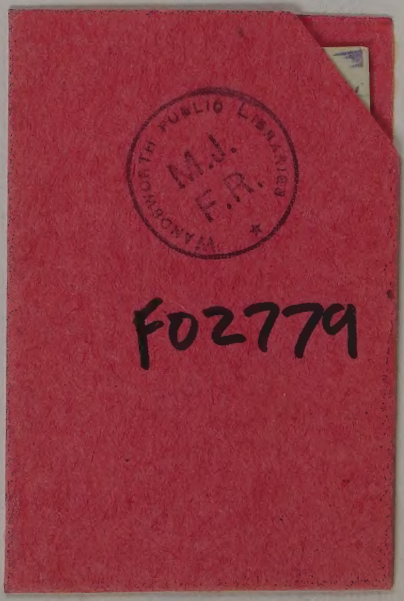
M.J.R.
F02779

BATTERSEA PARK LIBRARY,
BATTERSEA PARK ROAD,
LONDON. SW11 4NF.

82794
AUMONIER
BABY GRAND

100 715 955 07

C

The Baby Grand

And Other Stories

New 3/6 Titles for 1927

W. SOMERSET MAUGHAM
Of Human Bondage
Mrs. Craddock
The Magician

F. TENNYSON JESSE
Secret Bread
Tom Fool

CLEMENCE DANE
Regiment of Women

DENIS MACKAIL
Greenery Street

D. K. BROSTER
The Flight of the Heron

MARY BORDEN
Jericho Sands

SYLVIA THOMPSON
The Hounds of Spring

JOHN MASEFIELD
Odtaa

CECIL ROBERTS
The Love Rack

SOMERVILLE AND ROSS
The Big House of Inver

DALE COLLINS
The Haven

VIOLET HUNT
More Tales of the Uneasy

NORMAN VENNER
The Imperfect Impostor

GEORGETTE HEYER
Simon the Coldheart

MARGARET KENNEDY
The Ladies of Lyndon

CHRISTOPHER MORLEY
Thunder on the Left

THOMAS MOULT
Snow Over Elden

The Baby Grand

And Other Stories

By

Stacy Aumonier

London : William Heinemann Ltd.

02779
JOINT
FICTION
RESERVE.

First published August, 1926
Popular Edition (3*s.* 6*d.*), 1927

LAMBETH PALACE LIBRARY
BATTERSEA PARK ROAD,
LONDON, SW11 4HR.

E0000 57975

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
BILLING AND SONS, LTD., GUILDFORD AND ESHER

TO

MAUD AND "BOB"

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
I.	THE HAPPY MAN	9
II.	FUNERAL MARCH	86
III.	JUXTAPOSITIONS	108
IV.	BURNEY'S LAUGH	132
V.	THE BABY GRAND	158
VI.	BUSINESS AND DESIRES	189
VII.	THE ROOM	218
VIII.	NOT DONE	239
IX.	THE OLD LADY WITH THE TWO UMBRELLAS	269
X.	THE EVERLASTING CLUB	299

THE HAPPY MAN

I.

THERE had been much ado about a stool. You see during all the twenty odd years that Mr. Journée had been in business he had directed operations seated on a wooden box, that had eventually become polished to a beautiful brown shine by the friction of his pants. But when his son Anthony returned from college—where only by exercising the most rigid economies had his father been able to send him—and entered the workshops, the stool became a mild centre of discord. Anthony resented his father sitting on the box. There seemed something discreditable about it. At Rainsworth College, where he had fairly distinguished himself, people didn't sit on boxes. It was not as though there were no chairs about. There were several in that part of the workshop which served as a kind of reception-room. There were two even of a period somewhere about the respectable Mr. Chippendale. But when his son suggested a substitution he said no. He had always sat on the box, and it was quite good enough for him. He was quite huffy

about it, which for a man of his equable and lovable nature was remarkable.

Anthony made several more hints but they were of no avail. Then he adopted a very astute move. He waited until Christmas, and then on Christmas morning he presented his father with a beautiful circular mahogany stool with a green plush seat. He said: "I thought you might like this, dad, to sit on in the shop."

Mr. Journée was cornered for the moment. He coughed and spluttered out vague thanks. It was very good of the boy, of course, very good indeed. H'm! Yes, well, well—— When business was resumed after Christmas the stool was substituted for the box. But as the days went by it became apparent that Mr. Journée was not happy about it. He fidgeted restlessly upon his stool, and appeared preoccupied as though unable to concentrate on his work. And a week later Anthony found him seated once more on the box, with the stool tucked away under the bench. He said nothing, but he felt angry.

Now we have not sufficient evidence to convict Anthony of the disaster which happened the next morning, but it is certain that his sympathy appeared a little strained at the time. For when Mr. Journée went to sit down, there was a sudden crash, and the top of the box fell in, and Mr. Journée with it. When he picked himself up he called out:

"Who has been monkeying with this box?"

Anthony, who had been working on a clay model a dozen yards away, hurried forward and helped to rectify the disturbance, but, of course, he knew nothing about it. Mr. Journée growled and carried the box to another part of the workshop and with his own hands—he was a good workman—he repaired the box, and by an arrangement of splats and screws he made the box strong enough to support a he-elephant. And that was the end of that. Anthony gave up, and Mr. Journée continued to sit on the box to the end of his days.

II.

It might be advisable at this point to give a rough description of Mr. Journée's workshops. They were situated down a narrow cul-de-sac called Glaize Yard. You came to a black fence on which was inscribed: "Paul Journée, architectural carver in wood and stone." You entered an untidy yard, rendered unduly untidy by the prodigal litter of loose plaster. In the summertime the plaster blew about and covered everything like a frost. In the winter it was dangerous to walk on it on account of the slipperiness. The yard was filled with blocks of Portland stone, planks of timber, and dilapidated plaster-casts. The workshops were in a buff brick building on

two floors. The ground floor was devoted to plaster, stone, and sometimes marble. The floor upstairs was devoted to the noble purposes of fashioning wood, that loyal and ancient friend to man. It was a long narrow workshop with benches all along the wall under the window, with rows of gouges and wood-carvers' tools neatly arranged in front of each workman. The brick walls were distempered an Indian red, and on them were a bewildering number of casts, scraps of carving, sections of volutes, capitals, cornices, cherub's heads, acanthus scrolls, lions rampant, and lions couchant, and other heraldic devices, rough charcoal drawings, architectural photographs, and full-size details.

The other side of the long workshop had a socially and intellectually elastic character. For it had to express various activities without definite lines of demarcation. At the further end was a sink and some pegs, where the workmen washed and hung up their clothes. Then came two long benches covered with drawings and books, at which Mr. Journée and an old draughtsman, named Lintot, used to work. At the back of these benches were two white pine chests, a grandfather clock, and an oak chest. Then there came a break in the wall, and the workshop began to take on a slightly different character. One was slowly approaching the social and business end of the workshop, near the entrance door.

A deal bench was covered by a piece of green baize, on which reposed pens, ink, books, and correspondence. It was here that Mr. Journée conducted the administrative side of his business, seated on his wooden box. After that the workshop culminated in a surprising touch of the magnificent. For one thing there was a square of carpet, projecting sufficiently far out so that the wood-carvers could avoid it when passing in and out. There was a fine old walnut tallboy, another eight-day clock, three barometers, two Louis XVI. mirrors, a large framed print of the Colosseum at Rome, an oil-painting by an unknown Italian painter, an ebony and ivory Venetian chair, and three other old chairs. This was in effect Mr. Journée's reception-room, where he interviewed his clients, who were mostly architects.

III.

The incident about the stool had a disturbing effect on Mr. Journée. It was not that he regarded it as important in itself as that it symbolized a disquieting side of his son's nature. He himself was proud of his craft, of his good name, of his Huguenot stock. The Journées had been English craftsmen of some sort ever since the days of the massacre of St. Bartholomew. He was a simple man, with a simple outlook, and passionately devoted to his wife

and son. It had been one of his great ambitions that his son should take his place and carry on the fine tradition of his calling. But a few months' service in the workshop gave evidence that the young man was restless. It was not that he showed any lack of ability. He gave promise of being an extremely brilliant draughtsman. He was quick and clever in every way. But the father became subtly aware that the son in some way despised the business, and was even slightly contemptuous of himself. His own education had been of a very sketchy nature. He had had to earn his own living since he was fourteen. He occasionally dropped his "h's," and invariably his "g's." He dressed in a slightly eccentric manner, and was not alive to the finer meanings of social life. But in these matters he could find nothing important. He was wrapped up in his work.

When he had married at the age of twenty-four, he had been a journeyman wood-carver, earning tenpence an hour. His wife Bessie was the daughter of a piano-tuner. They lived in two rooms in Kentish Town, and the boy was born the following year. The early struggles of the young couple were severe. Being a journeyman carver he was always liable to an hour's dismissal, and when work was scarce he would frequently be out of employment for months. It says a good deal for the courage and faith of this young work-

man and the devotion and loyalty of his wife that they emerged from these conditions successfully. At the age of twenty-six, a relative died and left him seventy-five pounds, and he immediately set up in business for himself. He worked in a kind of scullery in the basement of the house where their lodgings were. He trapesed the streets of London with samples and photographs of his work, and called on innumerable architects. For the most part he was received with indifference if not with rebuffs, frequently with that chilling formula: "Very well. Leave your name and address. If an opportunity occurs, Mr. So-and-so, will let you know."

He was at that time a tall, clumsily-built young man, high-shouldered, and too long in the thin flanks. When he walked his spindley legs seemed to be shaking in disgust at the eager onrush of those hunched shoulders and that keen projecting chin. The face was narrow, and the nose and ears too large. His untidy black hair, which was short behind, fell in unmanageable strands across his temples and deep brown eyes. He looked like a gentle and reflective vulture, if you can conceive such a thing. But in this grim struggle to improve the lot of his kind he had one invaluable asset. Old Lintot—who was devoted to him—used to say in after years:

"Where the guv'nor gets away with it is that he *believes* in things."

And he just went on *believing* in things. He had a simple reverence for names, traditions, and beauty in every form. Not understanding much, he felt it all intensely. His dreams were coloured by magic yearnings. And because he believed in his dreams he gradually influenced others to believe in him. Sometimes at night when he and his wife were discussing how they could possibly buy boots for the growing boy, they would suddenly change the subject and talk eagerly about the wonderful trip they were going to make to Italy "one day." They had got on. The boy had been sent to a public school, but the dream of the trip to Italy had not yet materialized.

The disturbing thoughts that crept into the mind of Paul Journée when meditating upon his son's attitude, centred round a recurring doubt, a doubt that—well, with all his cleverness, his brilliance, his learning, did the boy really *believe* in things?

IV.

If Anthony's advent to his father's workshop opened inauspiciously it did in any case have one bright aspect to it, for it synchronized with a wave of comparative prosperity. It was as though nature, preparing this youth for a brilliant career, was deliberately determined to see that his setting should always be appropriate. Soon

after his arrival the father received a large order for carving on a municipal building in the Midlands, and soon after another large order for carved chair-backs. This latter demand came through Justin McGrath. The McGraths were the Journées closest and most intimate friends. Justin was a chairmaker with premises in the neighbourhood. He and his wife were much older than the Journées, and they had a daughter named Laura. Laura was a sweet-tempered, rather plain girl in her twenty-seventh year. She appeared to be considerably older, as a result, no doubt, of living her life and submerging it in the lives of two much older people. The old couple adored their daughter, and were entirely oblivious of how much they preyed upon her youth and vitality.

The two families supped together at least once a week, and looked in on each other at odd hours of the day and night. Mr. Journée always referred to Mr. McGrath as "the old 'un." These two elderly craftsmen would sit over their pipes in the evening and discuss Wren, and Jean Goujon, and Viollet-le-Duc. And they would lend each other books, over which they would pore, books with illustrations of Italian palaces, and sculpture, and gardens, of French cathedrals, and Spanish iron. They were neither of them of a keenly critical nature. They admired everything, as though hushed into a profound reverence

for the past. Mr. Journée would adjust his spectacles and exclaim :

"By Jove, old 'un, here's a fine frieze!"

And Mr. McGrath would adjust his, and make little clucking sounds of approbation. They belonged to a guild where men of their kind foregathered, and read papers and held discussions on the subjects which interested them. They went for a walk together regularly every Sunday morning in Regent's Park, whilst their wives prepared the Sunday dinner. Sometimes they allowed their minds to wander in abstract speculations. They touched on politics, religion, philosophy, and life, and so came to know each other.

During this year of Anthony's experiment in the workshop, the slow-moving mind of Mr. Journée became quietly occupied with a plan for the realization of a dream. For he was a careful man, and, as Lintot said, "never put his leg over the stile till he could see the other side." But things were going well, very well, better than they had ever gone before. After paying his workmen on Saturday morning he went carefully into his accounts. He made calculations and estimates. Yes, it could be done. It was now the end of February. He wouldn't tell Bessie. He would wait till April. She would be so bitterly disappointed if it didn't come off. Lintot and the foreman, Greville, would manage

somehow. They would go off for a month. They should realize that honeymoon dream of over twenty years ago—a month in Italy. Rome, Padua, Florence, Venice, Sienna. He could almost see the white palaces glistening in the sun, the cypress-trees, the olive-groves. He could almost hear the low, musical cry of the gondoliers, as they glided their craft down dimly-lighted canals out into the moon-flooded mystery of the Venetian night, where the festival is held under the shadow of the Santa Maria della Salute.

He suffered agonies of restraint in not breaking the news to his wife, but the months went by and April came. One Sunday morning when the daffodils were out in the Park, where he was walking with his friend McGrath, he suddenly thought: "I will tell her to-night." But he said nothing to McGrath. He felt it would be in some way mean to let anyone know until he had told her.

After tea that evening Anthony followed him into the drawing-room. The mother was washing up. He said:

"Father, can I have a bit of a jaw with you?"

Mr. Journée said: "Of course, my boy."

The young man seemed a little self-conscious and on edge. He suddenly blurted out:

"You know, I don't think I'm going to be any good at this business. It bores me."

An expression of troubled disappointment came into the eyes of Mr. Journée, but he answered quietly :

"What do you want to do, Anthony?"

"Father, you've been—been doing pretty well lately, haven't you? Couldn't you afford to send me to Paris? I'd like to go over there and study to become a painter. I know two other chaps going in the spring."

Mr. Journée looked into the bowl of his pipe. He took a long time to answer and when he did he said :

"Anthony, is it that you *really* want to become a painter? It isn't, is it, that you think you would just like to lead that kind of life?"

"No. I've got ambitions. I feel cramped here. Everyone says I have talent, don't they?"

"Yes, that's true."

He paused again and fumbled with a match.

"I want you to do what you think is right, my boy. I shall have to think this over."

And the young man went out, and Mr. Journée sat there thinking. He could hear his wife singing over the clatter of the teacups. Paris, eh? Of course, the boy must choose his own career. But—Paris! this would mean a lot of expense, years and years and the uncertain life of a painter. Of course, the boy's career was more important than—than their pleasures. But that would be the end of Italy—for the time. He poked the

fire and watched the grey ash fall into the pan. After a time his wife came in. He said :

"Well, mother, finished?"

"Yes, dear, there wasn't much to do."

The tones of his voice seemed a little clouded as, after a pause, he said :

"The McGraths are coming in to-night."

"Oh, I'm so glad."

A happy smile lighted the face of Mrs. Journée, as she picked up her work-basket, and took her accustomed seat facing her husband.

V.

Anthony was away until July, when he returned for a month's holiday. The two families shared a furnished house at Angmering for the month of August, with a rather surprising result. For Anthony and Laura fell in love. The boy had been working hard, and he was obviously keen and ambitious. The father was pleased to see that it was, indeed, "the thing itself" his son was seeking, and not the attractive features of a student's life in Paris. He had not felt justified in allowing him more than just sufficient to live on comfortably, and he had not got into debt. Although more animated and eager in his manners, his attitude was, if anything, graver than it had been before he went away. He was obviously in earnest. Well, well, in that case the postpone-

ment of the trip to Italy was justified. Business would improve, the boy would get on, the day would not be far distant. Neither Mr Journée nor Mr. McGrath could spare a whole month from their business. They stayed a fortnight and came down for the following two week-ends. It was on that first week-end, after they had been a week in town, that the truth was brought home to them.

It came about most unexpectedly. Anthony and Laura had known each other for years, and had never once regarded each other in any other light than as good friends. She was seven years older than he.

But there is something about the seashore which has always proved a source of trouble to wayward hearts. After four months' separation their meeting had about it an element of novelty. They saw each other in a new light. There were aspects about his Parisian experiences which caused Anthony to react rather violently to this familiar, simple-minded girl friend. He had found himself over there a little shy, home-sick, and bewildered. Everyone seemed so clever, so sophisticated, so very much a part of it all. He had not made many friends, and his knowledge of French was very imperfect.

One morning, lying on the beach after bathing, he looked at Laura, who was lying on her back by his side, taking a sun bath. She was wrapped

up in a towel, but her legs and arms were bare. Her healthy plump face was framed in loose brown hair drying in the sun. Her arms were stretched out, and her eyes closed, giving the impression of complete contentment. Her little pink feet were diapered with sand.

He looked away for a moment at the sea, and felt something queer stir within him. Why had he never thought of this before?

This happened during the first week of his stay. Angmering is a small place, and the days are idle. He had no other companions of his own age. Even if—even if nothing came of it, it was obviously the pleasantest way to pass one's time. They went for rambles on the dunes, and lay side by side beneath the tamarisks. And he told her eagerly of his life in Paris, his ambitions, and his hopes. And he took her hand, and romped with her, as brothers and sisters do. And still she did not see.

She was a difficult girl to flirt with. She accepted everything as a literal statement. Her large, grey, innocent eyes seemed proof against the most subtle erotic shafts. She was desperately happy!

One thing concerning her irritated him. He could not get her to come out with him in the evening. She would not leave her mother. In the raw daylight he still felt a little self-conscious. He had not had the experience to carry this thing

by storm without the aid of darkness. When it came to the question of any kind of protestation of this new-found passion he felt quite inarticulate. Perhaps there warred within him two forces uncertain of each other, a subconscious egoism that did not mean to be denied, and an unfamiliar passion he knew not how to interpret.

One night, however, the opportunity he was seeking occurred. She had finished a game of bezique with her mother, and dashed out hatless to the post. He followed, and at the angle of the road called after her. She stopped and said :

"Hullo, Tony, are you coming with me?"

He said "Yes" in a husky voice, and caught hold of her by the forearm. They were by the side of a steep grass bank that walled-in someone's garden. She noticed something strange about his pale face in the moonlight, and she said :

"What is it?"

For answer he threw his other arm around her, and kissed her clumsily on the cheek. And still he could see that she did not understand. She said :

"Are you in trouble, Tony?"

He tried to kiss her on the lips then, but she turned her cheeks away, and raised her arms between them.

"Don't be foolish," she said calmly.

"Can't you see?" he exclaimed almost angrily.

"What is it?"

"I love you, Laura."

But when the words left his lips they did not sound as he meant them to sound. They were less like an avowal of love than a complaint of ill-treatment. But he saw her start, as though awakened from a dream. She looked at him, with her lips half-parted. She was probably blushing, but he could not be certain. She muttered: "Oh, my dear, I did not know. You mustn't—you mustn't——" She hurried across the road to the pillar-box, and he followed her in silence.

When the letter was posted, and they were returning, they walked arm in arm, but he did not try to kiss her again. They walked back without speaking. He could see her bosom heaving, and her eyes were bright. At the gate she gave his hand a tight little squeeze and hurried in.

And as each of them fell asleep that night they both shared an emotion in common. It was an emotion which had in it something of an unknown blinding ecstasy; but the ecstasy of one was tinged with contentment and a profound happiness; the ecstasy of the other with a sense of fear and vague unhappiness.

VI.

Before the return of the two fathers the following Saturday, things moved with surprising rapidity. It took Laura two days to begin even to unravel the skeins of emotion which had suddenly entangled her. Love! She had read about love in books—when she had time to escape from her domestic obligations. She had even dreamed of love as a remote passion applying to far-off people. But to come upon *her* like this!

It was all wild and foolish. She was in any case much too old for Anthony, much too plain and dull. Nevertheless, the next morning she regarded him in an entirely new light. He had become very good-looking of late. Paris had improved him. Everyone said he was brilliant; that he had a brilliant career before him. Things came his way. He was quick, clever, and charming in manners when he wanted to be. She watched his lithe boyish figure sprinting across the sands. She saw the laughter and the love-light in those keen, dark, rather mysterious eyes. She liked him next to her, and what he said aroused a thousandfold more interest than it had done the previous day. She thought about him, and thought, and thought. And she thought about herself, and her father and mother, and her God. And a new book in her life seemed to be opened.

The first night she would not go out with him after supper, but the second night she did. The old ladies went to bed very early. They had all been for an excursion. Laura wanted to know, wanted to hear, in any case, how people spoke when they were in love. She wanted to hear how Anthony spoke. And that night he was eloquent enough. For he took her down on to the sandbanks and kissed her on the lips. She found herself clinging to him, and when he said he loved her, his voice was vibrant and convincing. For the first time she heard the voice of a lover speaking.

After that there was no pretence. Laura was incapable of pretending, and Anthony had no desire to. They spent the day rejoicing in each other, regardless of the glances of onlookers. For the first time in her life Laura neglected her mother in the evenings. At first the old lady did not understand. She became peevish and querulous. But Mrs. Journée was quicker in her perceptions. She did not rely upon her son with that taken-for-granted assurance that her friend relied upon her daughter. Perhaps for this reason she observed him more objectively. She was more sensitive to the shifts of his moods. She saw him again and again holding Laura's hand, gazing into her eyes——

And she thought: "Oh, dear! oh, dear! I wish it was Saturday and Paul was here." She

was unused to grappling with any emotional experience without her husband's help. This was tremendous, cataclysmic, almost beyond itself. Her Anthony! Nancy's Laura! And Laura was so much older—— She could not face it.

It was not until she was enveloped in comfortable darkness, in her own bed, on the Saturday night, and her husband was lying by her side, that she unburdened herself. Mr. Journée was at first inclined to laugh about it.

"I don't suppose there is anything in it, mother," he said. "Young people, you know, the sea air and that——"

Nevertheless, he was quite patently excited about it. To think that his son and Justin's daughter—after all these years. Of course, the girl was older than the boy, but still—— He told his wife about a new job he expected to get, a carved staircase for a rich South African. He thought it well to distract her attention. She might not sleep. She had probably not been sleeping too well. He felt a tinge of conscience that he should have been absent, when she was assailed by this emotional upheaval.

In the morning, he was up early, anxious to take his bearings. Justin came down later and after breakfast the two families wandered down to the beach. Mr. Journée was preoccupied. His fellow-guildsman wanted to tell him about a contract that a firm of decorators had secured

by bribing a consulting architect, and also about a sale of furniture that was coming off the following week in Hanover Square, but Mr. Journée's eyes were intently fixed upon two figures prancing about on the shore, and lying side by side against the breakwater, and his mind was occupied with doubts and misgivings. "Suppose he gets tired of her——"

In the afternoon he went for a walk by himself. Alone amidst the murmur of the sea, and the intermittent screaming of the gulls, he thought the thing out.

"No, I shan't tell the old 'un. It wouldn't be fair. He'll never notice. It will probably all blow over. I would trust Laura. But she's seven years older—— Anthony might get tired of her. He's clever. Poor Laura girl, you're dull and not too pretty. Of course, if it had all been just the other way about or in any case a little different—— My son and his daughter! But we must try and do the right thing, eh, old man? If the boy says anything I shall try and dissuade him. When he gets back to Paris——"

He hummed to himself perplexedly. In this great open space the world seemed very vast—vast and mysterious—and yet somehow wonderfully satisfying. The tamarisks nodded in the breeze, and the sun began to set.

"Life is very beautiful," he thought. "I mustn't let mother worry."

And then he went back home, for with all its beauty, nature, as he saw it then, seemed lacking in something.

The families spent a quiet evening. The two young ones disappeared soon after supper, and the four elders devoted the evening to a sleepily conversational game of whist. At half-past ten Mrs. Journée declared for bed, and the McGraths followed her. Mr. Journée said he would sit up a bit and read. The night was warm, and he sat near the window turning over the sheets of a Sunday newspaper which he had already read once. After a time he heard the garden gate click, and two people come whispering up the path. They stood near the window which was open, and he drew back into the room. It was not his place to overhear. He heard the front door open and shut, and two people tiptoeing up the stairs. He must have dozed after that, for the room seemed cold, when, with a start, he heard his name called, and, looking up, saw Justin standing by the door. The old 'un was in a dressing-gown, looking tousled, but somehow very agitated. He came straight up and, without any preliminaries, tapped him on the shoulder and said excitedly :

"Paul ! Paul, old man. Do you know that our two children are engaged ?" And he held out his hand.

VII.

Mr. Journée was a man who extracted extreme delight out of small things. It was an intense pleasure to him to polish his boots—he never allowed anyone else to touch his square-toed brown boots—brush his clothes, or clean out his pipe. When he came down in the morning at Angmering he would stroll out into the garden, take several deep breaths in a way someone had shown him, do a few clumsy exercises, and then light his pipe for a few whiffs before breakfast. He would stand there in the sun, blinking at the flowers or the glittering dew on a spider's web, and feel good. Nature felt good to him, because he never questioned her prescriptions. He liked to feel life pouring through him, and he the reverent medium for life's expression.

Before Anthony returned to Paris he enjoyed many such mornings. His early misgivings were overcome by the contagious optimism of the rest, and particularly of his old friend Justin. Justin dismissed the question of the difference in the ages of the young people as of little consequence. They were both young in his eyes, so what did a mere matter of seven years make in a lifetime? In his opinion it was an ideal match. His wife agreed with him, only adding a hope that they would not marry "for a long, long time." As for Mrs. Journée, she wept a little when she heard

that the affair was already settled, but she did not let her husband see her tears.

That the affair would not happen for a long, long time was fairly obvious. Anthony had only just begun to study for one of the most precarious professions in the world, and neither of the parents was in a position to set the young couple up in a life partnership. It gave Mr. Journée an opportunity of giving his son a broad hint that he should forego his extravagant ambitions, and return to the workshops. It was a solider career. In only a few years' time he might be able to make him a partner, and then he could marry and settle down. At the expression "settle down," Anthony tossed his head. He said that he had no intention of settling down, even when married. Settling down meant curbing your ambitions, becoming a cabbage. Mr. Journée didn't quite understand what he meant. He said defensively that there was "no harm in anyone having a touch of cabbage about them."

Nevertheless, having once acquiesced in the affair, Mr. Journée subscribed to it whole-heartedly. He was as excited as a schoolboy. He kissed Laura and already began to treat her as his own daughter. He playfully ragged his wife about it, and felt drawn closer than ever to his old friend. And in his morning walk—he always did a mile walk before starting his day's work—he dreamt of this new-born happiness the

earth was producing, and of his grandchildren—what he would do for them. Perhaps by that time the business would be paying well. He visualized soft clinging little limbs about his knees, and baby voices calling "Gandpa!" Anthony went back to Paris with his ambitions; but he left his heart behind, and also a beautiful gold ring set with a pearl and two small rubies (paid for by his father). It was all very rapid. But as Mr. Journée said, "It was not as though they had only *known* each other a month."

Two years passed rapidly and uneventfully. He and Laura corresponded frequently. We must not pry into these letters, but their devotion was apparent and constant. Laura began studying all the art books she could borrow, and she made frequent visits to the National Gallery and the Wallace Collection. She could already distinguish between a Raphael and a Raeburn. She was preparing herself as the wife of a famous painter.

One day Mrs. McGrath had a mild paralytic seizure. She was confined to bed for several months. Laura waited on her day and night. Coming out of the house one night and standing by the hall door, where Laura was seeing him off, Mr. Journée suddenly thought:

"Good Lord! Poor Laura, how she's ageing. She must he over thirty, but she looks—she looks anything to-night. Those dark lines round her eyes. It's quite time she was married——"

The problem began to obsess him. Anthony was getting on well. But—well, he had not sold a picture yet, and was not likely to for some time. His own business was going fairly well, but nothing to write home about. Old McGrath had his hands full to keep things going. But he would like the boy to get married. He spent long hours over his books, and his calculations. It was certain that he and his wife couldn't do that Italian trip until the young couple were launched. But still——

If only the boy would settle down a bit. It would be as cheap to keep them both in London as to keep the boy in Paris. If they could manage not to have children for a year or two, for instance ; or, for that matter, why shouldn't Laura go to Paris ?

Returning home one Sunday morning from their weekly walk, he said :

"Old 'un, I think it's time those children got married."

"Eh ? what's that ?" said Justin. "Married ! But surely Anthony could hardly——"

It was impossible for Mr. Journée to explain that he was thinking less of his son in the matter than of his friend's daughter. He pretended to a greater state of affluence than he had any claim to. After a good deal of misgiving he offered to set the young people up "in a modest way" until such time as Anthony should be in a position

to support the household. The old 'un almost shed tears of gratitude. It would certainly be very desirable. He deplored the fact that he could do so little himself. He would, however, do what he could. Mrs. McGrath, on the other hand, offered every objection. It was wrong for young people to marry without means. Besides, what was going to happen to her?

"I married when I was earning tenpence an hour," argued Mr. Journée. And as a bright after-reflection he suggested that, perhaps, they would agree to live with Mr. and Mrs. McGrath so that Laura could still carry out her filial obligations. When Anthony came home for the Christmas holidays the proposal was put to him, and to everyone's surprise he accepted it.

VIII.

Anthony and Laura were married the following Easter. The ceremony was carried out with as much éclat as the means of the parties concerned allowed for. Mr. Journée was all for a little show. He liked the ceremonial and sentimental side of it. He bought a tail-coat and a top-hat. A wedding cake was ordered, and they were married in a church. The ceremony was followed by a wedding breakfast to which some fifteen guests were invited. Mr. Journée was up early in a great state of excitement. Being a nervous man

he fussed over every little detail. He was the kind of man who, when he had to catch a train, was always at the station at least three-quarters of an hour before the train was due to start. And at the wedding he was ready at least two hours too soon, fussing about and calling out:

"Now then, Mary, has that claret come yet? Mother, are you nearly ready? Anything I can do, my dear? God bless my soul! we haven't any cigarettes for the young men. Where's Anthony? You mean to say the boy's not up yet! Does he know it's *his* wedding and not mine? Anthony! Anthony!"

Anthony took no pains to show that all this fuss was distasteful to him. He regarded it as frankly Philistine, not to say, common. He would have liked to have been married at a registrar's office, and to have quietly slipped away. He was in a perfect dread that his father would want to make a speech at the wedding breakfast, saying silly and sentimental things and dropping his "h's" and "g's" all over the place. Fortunately, there would be no one there who mattered. He thought, however, that it was advisable to give way on certain points, as he had been somewhat lordly in his terms in agreeing to the wedding at all. He had agreed that he and his wife should live with the McGraths, on the understanding that he had a studio out. He had, indeed, become a little tired of Paris,

and the idea of marriage seemed to present a pleasant change. He was anxious, too, to work on his own, unrestricted by French professors.

His attitude at the wedding breakfast was, rather, one of bored tolerance. He did not know that his father had actually rehearsed a speech. Mr. Journée wanted to talk about love and happiness, about his own married life, and his long friendship with the bride's father. When he got upon his legs, however, his eye alighted on his son's face, and he merely stammered :

"Ladies and gentlemen, I give you the toast of the bride and bridegroom."

Everyone cheered and raised their glasses, and there were loud calls for a speech from the bridegroom, but the latter gentleman merely shook his head and smiled uncomfortably. He was anxious to be off.

When they left there was the usual tragic-comic parting associable with such events. The funny man and some of his friends, to whom it meant just a wedding, some of whom had drunk a little too much and were hilarious ; the Journées and McGraths rather pathetically trying to be gay ; Mrs. McGrath weeping a little when she kissed her daughter ; the bride radiantly happy and trying not to cry ; Mr. Journée showing meticulous interest in all the details of their journey to the Isle of Wight, where they were going for the honeymoon, and all the time deeply

stirred by the larger aspects of the great affair; the bridegroom posing as essentially the man of the world, to whom being married was an every-day occurrence.

They went at last, and the guests gradually departed. Mr. McGrath went too, as he had to see a man on business. The two mothers sat in the drawing-room and talked. The evening crept on. Mr. Journée put on his hat and strolled across to his workshops, which had been closed for the day in honour of the event. He let himself in and went upstairs.

Deep in thought, he paced the long, narrow shop. On the other side of the yard were other workshops, from which came the sound of someone beating on iron. It had a soothing rhythmic sound. He became subtly aware of the smell of wood. Wood! all his life had been spent under the smell of wood. At the end of the shop was a heap of pine shavings. He went up and stirred them affectionately with his foot. Then he strolled along the benches, examining the men's work.

"H'm!" he thought, "Dawes is getting too much relief into the scroll. Some of these fellows get a tool in their hand and there's no holding 'em. I must tell him. By Jove! that's a lovely egg-and-tongue! Charlie's cutting that beautifully. That young man will get on. I shall have to give him another twopence an hour soon.

Sievewright's clamped this baluster in a funny way. I don't see how he's going to get at it. Must ask him to-morrow."

He put on his steel-rimmed spectacles, and examined Lintot's drawing.

"Now where has that old man got that detail from? It's not Gibbons. It's not even Inigo Jones. Clever old rascal though! Expect he has some authority."

He wandered down towards the administrative side of the shop. Suddenly he caught sight of a stool beneath his writing-bench. Quite mechanically he pulled it out and examined it. It was a circular mahogany stool with a green plush seat. He had forgotten all about it. It still looked bright and new and somehow uncompanionable. He turned it over and muttered:

"H'm, yes, very good of the boy, very good, of course."

Then he tucked it away in the place from which he had taken it. The workshop seemed to get a little lonely then. He lighted his pipe, the match flickering impatiently over the bowl, as though the hand that held it was not quite steady. Then he pulled his large slouch hat over his eyes and went out.

IX.

Work is the social leaven that keeps men and women sane. Some people avoid it and become

degenerates. Others abuse it and become unbalanced. It was work which kept the eye of Mr. Journée bright, whilst his son was away on his honeymoon. It was work which drove Anthony back from his honeymoon, rather precipitately a week before he was due. He had become restless. After a few days at the sea, he became convinced that there was no need for the delights of early married life to interfere with the thrust of his ambitions. He had seen the great world, and he desired to be part and parcel of it. His fingers itched to express something that should be noticed—something that would make his name. Laura talked of her home, and what she would do with the rooms allocated to them, and how she would manage details that seemed hardly worth worrying about to Anthony. He had already, in imagination, designed the palace they would live in when he was famous. He visualized receptions where all the notabilities foregathered, and he and Laura standing at the top of a noble staircase receiving them. He could already hear the hushed whispers of the crowd: "Look! there he is, that's Anthony Journée!"

The explanation of their return was perhaps a little lame, but it satisfied the parents. When Mr. McGrath said raggingly:

"What, my dear, tired of honeymooning already?"

She blushed and whispered:

"It didn't seem important being down there, dad. Our life is going to be one long honeymoon. Besides, Anthony naturally wants to get on with his work, and I must get the place straight."

They both set about their respective duties with avidity. The person most delighted to see them back was old Mrs. McGrath. Nothing had been right while Laura was away. She could never find anything. Her food was never cooked properly. Her husband was out all day and the servant neglected her, and was rude and careless.

"If you hadn't come back soon, my dear, I'm sure I should have been really seriously ill."

All that was soon put to rights. Anthony went off to his studio directly after breakfast and returned in time for dinner in the evening. This in itself was an innovation to the McGraths and the Journées, who were accustomed to have their dinner midday. Anthony was not made aware of the time and attention devoted to his mother-in-law. The rooms he lived in were clean and bright and comfortable. His dinner was always excellently cooked and served. He did not know that it was the second hot meal his wife had cooked that day. Indeed, he made no inquiries at all about the domestic details of the McGrath household. He arrived home rather surly and preoccupied. Laura soon discovered that it was better to say little to him till he had fed. After dinner he would stretch himself, talk glib satis-

faction about his day's work, be a little amorous, smoke many cigarettes, read the newspaper, and go to bed.

Laura was perfectly happy. In only one particular did she find her union with Anthony disconcerting. And that curiously enough was in connection with his work.

She had taken great pains to attain some understanding of the old masters. And to her alarm she found she was all wrong. Anthony seemed to have no great respect for the old masters. He spoke of them superciliously, in the same tone that he spoke of the McGrath's and Journée's relatives and friends. It was as though he had something up his sleeve about them that it was hardly worth his while to impart to her. His own work seemed quite incomprehensible. He painted in the manner of some French school she had not heard of. It impressed her as being curiously angular and unconvincing. Neither did he ever seem very anxious that she should come round to his studio. If she went, he would kiss her and play with her hair, but he made no attempt to explain his work. It appeared to be the kind of painting that was done by a certain set, and which, in a few years' time, would become all the rage.

But if Laura was bewildered by her husband's surprising productions, Mr. Journée was even more so. He arrived all aglow to observe his

son's progress. He was given to understand that he principally painted interiors, and he envisaged an immature, but promising display of works in the manner of Pieter de Hoogh. Instead of which he found himself regarding most astonishing daubs of pink and green, tables all out of perspective, curious patterns, intending to represent herrings and teapots and such-like things.

In his naïveté he asked what it was all about, and Anthony simply shut him up. He told his father he knew nothing about art, and was very rude to him. It was the unpleasantest interview that had ever taken place between father and son. Discussing it that night with old McGrath—he had forgiven his son by then—he said :

"I don't know, old 'un, I'm sure. It seems to me funny stuff. Founded on nothing. Of course, I may be wrong. I've been brought up to believe in tradition. But perhaps we're getting out of date, old 'un. The boy says it's the thing that's coming. He talks above my head. I've never yet heard of anything good coming out of nothing. But we may be wrong. Life is very mysterious. These young people——"

He paused and blinked at the gas chandelier.

"Do people buy that kind of thing?" grunted the old 'un.

"Ah! that I don't know. He said nothing about that."

"He said nothing about it!"

The two elderly gentlemen sat there in silence; Mr. McGrath surprised that his friend should show so little sympathy for the interests of his daughter; Mr. Journée wondering whether the long tradition of craftsmanship he had the honour to represent was going to end in abortion or genius.

X.

It was a strange two years which followed this union of the Journées and McGraths. Beneath the surface of apparent success there was a disturbing undercurrent. Over many pipes Mr. Journée often pondered whether he had been wise in sending his son to a public school, in allowing him to go to Paris, in lavishing upon him more than the surplus of his hard-earned gains. He had read somewhere a line which ran: "Each man kills the thing he loves," and the phrase haunted him. At the same time he felt that Anthony was in some queer way beyond him. He felt a little proud—as people always do—of producing something he didn't understand. And it produced in him a certain sense of egotistical vanity to be able to tell his friends that his son was going to be a painter, that he had been to Paris, and that he had a studio of his own. After his own hard lot and struggles it appeared to him a piquant luxury to be the parent of such a situation.

He buried himself in his workshops, making large charcoal drawings of pediments and friezes, supervising the workmen, getting out estimates of cornices and egg-and-dart at so much per foot. He kept his accounts—seated on his wooden box—paid his men, interviewed architects, got out quantities for builders, and discussed detail with Lintot. The business fluctuated. Sometimes he was very busy, sometimes very slack. On the whole doing fairly well.

He would have been really in a position to put money by, but for the expenses of his married son. It was not that the boy was extravagant in himself—his domestic expenses were negligible, thanks to Laura. But his muse appeared to be an eccentric mistress. She required an enormous number of canvases and strange colours, and materials. And occasionally it appeared to be imperative that the young artist should go over to Paris or Munich. He always went by himself, and usually returned more reserved and aloof than usual, more oblivious to his surroundings. He began to develop a personality that could only be described as exotic. There were lines of insolent beauty about his face and the poise of his head. Also he made friends in Chelsea and Kensington, people of a wealthy æsthetic set. He never took his wife there, and hardly ever referred to them among his own family. It was as though he considered it impossible to explain. These were

two alien worlds. In the one he was loved, and love is a quality common to the masses. In the other he was admired, and admiration is a quality reserved for the few.

It was old McGrath who began to kick against the situation. A child was expected. And as he said to his friend one night:

"Paul, how much longer is this monkeying about with new art going on? What is going to happen when the child comes? It's unfair on you."

Mr. Journée frankly didn't know what to do. He wanted to do the best for the boy. It was not as though he were indolent or dissolute. He worked very hard and was very keen. It was true he didn't understand his son's work. But he might be wrong. He knew that he mixed with people who were much talked about and who admired his son, who avowed that he had genius. But the time must come when ways and means would have to be considered. One day he decided that he would take his son to task and thrash the whole matter out.

He said nothing to his wife at supper-time. He felt nervous. He thought out carefully just what he would say to his son, the questions he would put, the advice he would give—he was a difficult boy to talk to. He was always slightly apprehensive that his son was laughing at him deep down in his soul, that he meant nothing to

him at all, except as a rather foolish means to an enigmatic end.

After supper he put on his hat and toddled across to the McGraths. Old Justin turned on the light in the hall, and opened the door to him. He said:

"Good-evening, old 'un, is the boy in?"

Old McGrath stared for a moment as though hardly recognizing him. Then he said: "No. He left this afternoon for Paris. He said it was very important. He borrowed ten pounds from me."

Then, melting to a different mood, the old man seized his hand and added:

"Come in, Paul. Laura's very bad."

XI.

The child—a boy—was born forty-eight hours later, after what the doctor described as "a very difficult case." Anthony had not returned. They wired to him, and received a reply the following day: "Congratulations, love, wiring later, Anthony." They heard no more from him for four days, and there was a distinct rift in the lute of family affection. Laura made no complaint.

"He is busy," she said. "Besides, what good can he do? He will come soon."

She was, perhaps, too blinded by this magic

bundle of delight that had so abruptly, painfully, and mysteriously thrust itself into her life to be unduly perturbed by the absence of her husband. But Mrs. McGrath complained that she thought it was "a very curious way of going on," and Mr. McGrath was righteously indignant. He was even inclined to blame Mr. Journée, as though he considered that he was partly to blame.

If you thrust a stick into an ants' nest and stir it up the ants immediately start rebuilding. But human creatures are not so recuperative. It takes time for their emotions to focus before building work can be even considered. It seemed a curiously hard, cruel stick that Anthony had suddenly thrust into this nest, unnecessarily cruel and thoughtless, to say the least of it. Fancy deserting one's wife in such a crisis, going off without explanation, and sending such a bald telegram!

On the fourth day, however, the further telegram as promised arrived. Its contents were equally astonishing. It ran: "Sold picture *petit salon* fifteen thousand francs, writing, love, Anthony." On the receipt of this telegram the ants immediately foregathered and tried to piece their emotions into a workable form. Laura exclaimed:

"Oh, I'm *so* glad for him. He will be so happy, poor dear. He's sure to come back soon now."

And she went on feeding the baby. Mr. McGrath said:

"Good gracious me!" and he took out an envelope and, on the back of it, he rapidly calculated that the sum meant something between four and five hundred pounds.

They all agreed—they were all anxious to—that this accounted for everything. Anthony had had an appointment with some wealthy client, whom he had gone over to meet. But why had he said nothing about it? Mr. Journée was very perplexed. So far as he knew, his son had never sold a thing in his life, and this seemed a vast sum for a novice. Of course, he was glad, glad, very glad. It meant that he was wrong. There must be something in the boy's work after all. At the same time he couldn't help feeling that —well, he wished he hadn't gone off like that. He wasn't sure that he wouldn't rather have had the boy stick by his wife and not sell the picture, even at a loss to himself.

It was not till three days later that the letter came to Laura. She did not show it to the others, but she tried to tell them the gist of it. It seemed rather a confused description, affecting as it did, various people they had not heard of. There appeared to be an Italian countess, who was a sculptress and lived in Chelsea. She had a great friend in Paris, another Italian woman, the wife of a wealthy South American. She

adored the "Vortex School," and had bought works by Pinneti, Lammonde, and Sasha McFay, three of the greatest exponents. It was she who had introduced Anthony to the South American. He had been to stay with them at Fontainebleau. The outcome was the sale. She was likely to buy more. He hoped to return the following week—— There was nothing more in the letter that Laura quoted, and it was the quick eye of Mr. Journée that detected a tear hovering near her lash as she finished.

"Damn the boy!" he thought as he turned away.

XII.

Who were all these people, Pinneti, Lammonde, Sasha McFay? What in God's name was the Vortex School? Why was Anthony running about the Continent with Italian countesses, when he should be dancing attendance on his wife? Mr. Journée was seriously alarmed. The act seemed to mark the first definite line of cleavage between his son's life and his own. He recalled vividly the night when Anthony was born. He was out of work at the time, and they were living in poor lodgings in Kentish Town. He had only a few pounds in the world. He remembered his feverish pacing of the streets, his tearing anxiety, his complete sense of helplessness. He ate nothing for twenty-four hours. He remembered

in a spasmodic fit of abstraction, going out late in the afternoon and selling a marble clock that had been given him by an uncle as a wedding present, for fifteen shillings. He remembered turning the fifteen shillings over in his hand, staring hard at it, regarding it lovingly—another tiny bulwark to protect his wife's life. He remembered his reward—that blinding ecstasy in the early hours of a Sunday morning. She was well, well, and the child lived—nothing else mattered! He had got work soon after and their marital bliss had not been obscured for one hour.

And Anthony? Was it just Anthony, or was it the gesture of this modern generation that had lost the sense of tradition? From what he could see of them, looking around, they seemed to be thin, evanescent people, irreverent, respecting neither themselves, nor others, nor the past. They lived in postures, and phrases, and a kind of morbid self-analysis unconnected with life. It was deplorable. He had never met these people only by hearsay and books and the theatre. He had hardly accepted them as reality. It had taken his son's defection to bring home to him the truth that such people lived.

Amidst the shavings, the smell of wood, and the sound of mallets striking gouges, he decided that he would have it out with Anthony when he returned. Unfortunately it was a full week before

this happened, and by that time his anger—as usual—had abated. He yearned for his son, and wanted to see him again.

Anthony returned nonchalantly, as though his behaviour had been quite normal. He went in to see his wife and child, and later in the evening the two families sat round Laura's bed, and he became quite eloquent. It was true that he only talked about himself, but the father could not resent a sneaking pride in his son. There was about him a certain richness of personality, a definite promise of distinction. He was no ordinary young man. The world, so hard to others, had to make allowances for such a creature. He had sold two other pictures to this Madame Forzamba, the wife of the South American. He had returned enriched by over a thousand pounds!

He did not seem to regard it as very remarkable, merely the natural due to his genius. He said nothing about repaying his father, or making other arrangements for his family. He took a perfunctory interest in the baby, and said he should like to see it painted by Lammonde.

The next morning he was at his studio, working feverishly. He never went to his father's workshop, or inquired what he was doing. The next evening he went to Chelsea and did not get home till three in the morning.

This went on for several days. He spent an

hour or two with his wife, but finding that she was most inconveniently bedridden for the time being, he dined out in the evening and came home late. When with the family he sat around like one doped. He gazed at the poorly furnished rooms, and could hardly conceal the expression of disgust upon his face. It was apparent that he was in an atmosphere entirely uncongenial and distasteful to him. His mind was wandering elsewhere. On the fourth evening, Mr. Journée met him going out. He went straight up to him and said :

"Anthony, come over to the shop. I want to talk to you."

There was a hard drawn line about the father's mouth. They walked over in silence and went upstairs. The men had gone. Mr. Journée lighted a gas-jet and said :

"Sit down."

They were both terribly self-conscious, as between two men fond of each other, but separated by a wide gulf of unfamiliar experience. After a time Mr. Journée said :

"Anthony boy, I don't think—I don't think you're quite playing the game. You went off like that and left Laura just when she—— We all feel it very much—your mother, too——"

He coughed, and Anthony shifted uneasily in his seat. He said in a weak voice :

"I had to. It was business, you know."

"I've never heard of you being interested in business before. Talking of that, boy, I think now that you—that you are—well, beginning to make a move, I think it's up to you to keep your wife and child. Mother and I have been only too happy that we could help a bit—you know, when you really needed it. But business is not too good. We have to think of old age and that——"

"Yes, of couse," said Anthony, and there was a meaningless, non-committal pause. In Mr. Journée's voice there suddenly came a more vibrant note.

"But, Anthony boy, I don't really care so much about that. It's you I'm thinking of. This set you get in to. I know nothing about it. Only I don't—I don't—I'd rather you——"

Mr. Journée became inarticulate. Under the flickering light of the one gas-jet he could just see the dark, mocking eyes of his son. And in the son's voice there crept a note of querulous anger.

"You don't understand," he said, and stood up.

Mr. Journée was about to reply, also on a note of anger. Then he looked down at the blotting-paper on the desk in front of him. After a pause he said resignedly:

"No, I suppose I don't understand."

He looked crumbled and careworn. Anthony

edged towards the door. The situation was intolerable. With his hand on the latch he said :

" Good-night, father !"

Mr. Journée did not look up. He replied quietly :

" Good-night !"

After he had gone, Mr. Journée continued to stare at the blotting-paper. Once he mumbled to it :

" No, I suppose I don't understand."

Out in the street Anthony picked up a vagrant taxi. To the man he cried angrily :

" Drive like blazes to the Café Royale !"

XIII.

That Laura had some curious appeal for him was incontestable. For a few weeks after she was up and about again he actually took her to call on his friend, the Countess Strozzetti, at Chelsea. How much he was influenced by the interview with his father it is impossible to say. But in his own way he certainly gave evidence of certain feelings of remorse at his behaviour. He was too proud or too egoistic to say anything about it, but he paid more attention to his wife. He bought her a necklace, and suggested that they should take a house of their own in the neighbourhood. But this, of course, raised the old difficulty of Mrs. McGrath. The old lady, how-

ever, was overridden in her wishes by the other members of the family. It was pointed out to her that it was only fair, since Anthony was wishing to play the game, that he should be allowed a home of his own. Moreover, being in the neighbourhood, Laura could pop in every day for such time as she could spare from the baby.

They, therefore, rented a seven-roomed semi-detached house less than half a mile away, and at the next quarter-day Anthony wrote quite a polite note to his father and said that he thought he should be able to manage all right now, and at the same time he thanked him for all his kindness in the past. It was the kind of thing he could write to his father, but which he would have been much too self-conscious to say. But the gesture alone made Mr. Journée very happy. A good boy, Anthony, a splendid chap! Just had his head a wee bit turned by this sudden and facile success. Of course, he had never meant to act like that. Returning from their guild meeting that night—where the paper had been on "French engravings of the seventeenth and nineteenth centuries"—Mr. Journée discussed it with Justin.

"What I object to about these new-fangled movements is just that very thing: it has no relation to true values. When we started in, old 'un, we were paid according to our worth—starting at fivepence and sixpence an hour—this,

mind you, after serving a long apprenticeship without payment. We had to learn our job—a recognized job with a tradition behind it. We didn't suddenly make a thousand pounds like a stockbroker. To whom can a painting of a beginner like Anthony possibly be worth four hundred pounds or more? It's an artificial growth on the side of true art."

Mr. Journée was rather pleased with this last phrase, and he repeated it. And Justin, knocking his pipe out against a lamp-post, said:

"Yes, not only on the side of art, too, Paul; on the side of society. It is impossible to teach this younger generation that nothing comes out of the blue. They believe it does. Sometimes they snatch something out of the blue. They think they've found the divine afflatus. Instead of that it's a thunderbolt, and it destroys them. We've linked up, you see, linked up with the dead and —the unborn."

Mr. Journée accompanied his friend home. They found Mrs. McGrath sitting by the fireside, knitting.

"Well, Nancy," said Mr. Journée, "how are——" he was about to say "the children," but feeling that it might be an embarrassing question he altered it to "things?"

Mrs. McGrath had a queer puzzled look on her face. She said with what was for her considerable animation:

"Anthony has taken Laura out to a party—some of his friends in Chelsea."

The two fathers looked at each other. They could not have appeared more surprised if Mrs. McGrath had informed them that he had taken her to the South Pole. Mr. McGrath sat there with his mouth open. Mr. Journée was about to utter an exclamation but thought better of it. He yawned, and said casually:

"Oh, that's nice—that's very nice."

XIV.

Anthony explained to his wife that it wasn't a party they were going to, it was just a "studio evening." One didn't have to dress. She had never heard of a "studio evening," and she didn't like to ask what it meant. Nevertheless, she felt all agog, a little flustered and nervous, but terribly proud that Anthony should condescend to take her to meet his friends. She wore her best frock, and examined her face carefully in the mirror. It was some time since she had taken such a close personal interest in her own face. She noticed the little sharp-cut lines developing beneath her eyes, the tiny cracks along the brow, the slightly puffy chin. It was no good. She was beginning to show her age. And yet she felt happy and high-spirited. There was nothing to be ashamed of in getting old. She

thought of a child's book illustration she had seen years ago. "Jane is a good girl and has a kind face." Perhaps she looked like that.

She had, in any case, a handsome and clever husband, a child, a home. One couldn't expect everything.

They arrived at the studio just before ten, and there were already about twenty people there. The first thing that struck her was that their hostess, a large, dark, rather handsome woman, with a suspicion of down on her upper lip, called Anthony "Pan." Her greeting was:

"Hullo, Pan! Good egg!" and then catching sight of Laura, she said: "Is this the wife? How nice!"

She shook hands, and, without waiting for any further greeting, she continued:

"Lobby is being perfectly absurd. He keeps on giving an imitation of Sarah Bernhardt, and it's no more like her than it is like George Robey. I wish you'd shut him up, Pan."

When Laura had had time to focus the room and the company, she found herself in a most astounding environment. Several women were sitting straddle-legged on cushions on the floor, drinking coffee or beer; others were lolling on ottomans or against easels. Everyone seemed to be leaning against something. There was a loud buzz of talk, frequently broken by strident laughter. A swarthy-looking Jewish man, in a

black shirt and a black scarf with no apparent collar, was talking to a thin woman with a dead white face and carmine lips. A fierce-looking man, with a square blond beard, was striking his left palm with his right fist and declaiming :

"My dear nincompoop, James Branch Cabell is not a romanticist. He's a mountebank."

A large-eyed young man listening to him appeared to be about to burst into tears. A pretty woman, who looked like a mischievous linnet, with bright eyes, caught hold of Anthony and said :

"Hullo, Pan, how are you, darling?"

She was about to dart away without waiting for an answer, when Anthony grabbed her. He said :

"Come here, you little devil! This is my wife. Laura, this is Gina Cherbourg, one of the worst adventuresses in London!"

Gina squealed with laughter, and held out her hand to Laura.

"Nice!" she said. "Have some coffee?"

Laura felt it incumbent upon her to try and adapt herself to her surroundings. She said :

"Yes, I'd like some, please."

The linnet darted away, but she was caught by two young men in plus fours, one of whom was wearing a monocle. It looked curiously out of place. He said to the linnet :

"Darling, I haven't seen you for a week. Keep still. I want to make love to you."

The other young man turned away, as though this type of conversation bored him. Catching sight of Anthony, who was standing at his elbow, he grunted:

"Hullo, Pan!"

Anthony said: "Look after my wife a minute. I want to talk to Bistowe."

The young man turned to Laura and gave a stiff little bow. He looked at her closely, and she was fully conscious of having his entire disapproval. She could see him desperately trying to think of something to say. At last he said:

"Do you know the Challices?"

"No," said Laura.

This reply also seemed to meet with his disapproval. He said:

"We had an awful binge there last night."

Laura didn't know what a "binge" was, but she said politely enough:

"Really!"

After that the conversation lapsed. She saw Anthony across the room, the centre of a group. She couldn't hear what he was saying, but he was making them all laugh. He seemed to be imitating someone's broken English. A large man, with a walrus moustache, was splitting with laughter, and kept slapping Anthony on the back and exclaiming: "Good! good! excellent!"

The linnet had forgotten all about Laura's coffee, but a schoolboy, very proud of his office, was handing round cakes. He offered her some and she said :

"Thank you very much," and took a piece.

After a considerable interval of neglect, the hostess came up to her with a thin, sad-faced man who looked terribly ill. She said :

"Mrs. Journée, I want to introduce you to an old friend of your husband's, Bernard Ossip. Bernard, this is Pan's wife !"

The melancholy man looked doubtfully at his hostess and said :

"I didn't know he had a wife" ; then, taking her hand, which he squeezed very hard between his bony fingers, he exclaimed : "Well I'm damned !"

They were left alone, and he continued :

"Paint at all ?"

"No, not at all."

He nodded, as much as to imply that anyone could see that. Then he appeared to rouse himself from his stupor, and said with a degree of animation :

"Your husband's a genius. I was with him in Paris. We shared an apartment in the Rue Visconti."

"Oh yes, of course," said Laura, who seemed now to have vaguely heard the name Ossip mentioned once. Anthony's friend proceeded :

"Have you seen the Sasha McFay's at Ryders?"

"No," she answered, "not yet."

He nodded again, as though realizing that he had asked a foolish question. After a pause he said: "I don't know whether Pan told you. I've been very bad, you know—kidneys; doctor thought I had Bright's disease."

"Oh, I *am* sorry," said Laura, really meaning it.

"It pulls you down so. Anything to do with the kidneys is always depressing. You have to stick to a diet——"

He was about to enter into further details about his kidneys, when a girl in a jade green frock went to the piano, and sang a French song. It was charmingly done, and the company all laughed at the various sallies. Laura laughed too. It was funny, it was all very funny, but—why had Anthony married her?

She caught sight of his handsome face, silhouetted against a dark curtain. He was so very much at home here, so different, so animated, so happy. These people understood him, and liked him. It wasn't all his fault, poor boy! What was she going to do? She could never fit in. It was an utterly different world she found herself in, and it was Anthony's world. It couldn't be helped.

Going home in the cab he did not seem dissatis-

fied with her. He did not say much, but he was in good spirits. He had drunk quite a number of glasses of *crême-de-menthe,* and he kissed her rather sloppily on the lips. She made no protest.

The next morning her mother said :

"Well, dear, what was it like?"

She replied :

"Oh, it was very amusing, mother. Very different, you know, very different from—what we are used to."

XV.

One late September morning, Mr. Journée awakened with a twinge of rheumatism in his left shoulder. It was a melancholy day, with the rain coming down in torrents.

"Oh, dear!" he thought, "and soon we shall have winter here! Seven or eight months of it!"

And suddenly his mind reverted to the old desire—Italy! At that moment the sun would be gilding the dome of St. Mark's. The little church of San Miracule, which he had studied so often in photographs, would be trembling with light against the deep blue sky. The peasant women in their black shawls would be flocking into the Baptistery at Florence. The maize fields would be a blaze of gold. Well, why not? The years of physical enjoyment were numbered. Anthony was getting on. He had sold two more of his

extraordinary pictures. He was no longer dependent on his father.

Mr. Journée got up, rubbed his shoulder with ointment, washed himself, and went down to breakfast. So optimistic did he suddenly feel that he said to his wife :

"Mother, what do you say? why shouldn't we do that little trip to Italy?"

Mrs. Journée was never at her best in the early morning. The servants hadn't been able to get the fire to go, and the bacon was burnt, the boy had left a white loaf—Mr. Journée always had to have brown—and there was a bill from a dressmaker. She said :

"Oh, don't talk such nonsense, Paul."

Mr. Journée made allowances. They had been married for twenty-seven years, and he had, perhaps, talked too much about this trip to Italy, —talked and done nothing. There always seemed some obstacle. And on a morning like this, with the rain pouring down, and all the petty frictions of domestic life, it seemed as remote as ever.

In the evening, however, he broached the subject again. It was feasible. He could afford it. They were not very busy, and Lintot could manage while he was away. Over her sewing Mrs. Journée pondered the problem carefully. As a young girl it had been her wildest dream to go to Italy with Paul. The idea no longer excited her. She was happy in her home, and travelling

frightened her. But still—if *he* wanted to go, why, yes, yes, of course. There was no longer Anthony to consider. It would doubtless do Paul good. She said :

"It would be lovely, dear."

Mr. Journée bought a Baedeker, a map, and got together a collection of travel bureau circulars. He worked the whole thing out carefully in detail : Paris, Milan, Verona, Venice ; then to Florence, Sienna, Rome, and back to Genoa. They would start at the end of the month.

During the following weeks Mr. Journée walked about as though in a dream. He was like a schoolboy with the end of term approaching. One evening he was sitting in his workshop, after the men had gone, going into his accounts. There was a sudden knock at the door, the click of the latch, and Justin came hurrying in. One glance at his face, and Mr. Journée could see that his friend was in trouble. He instinctively stood up. Justin came straight up to him and said :

"Paul, Paul, I'm in for it !"

"What's the matter, old man ?"

"My workshops were burnt down last night, and, my God ! I'd forgotten to send the insurance money last week ! I'm ruined, Paul !"

Mr. Journée stood erect, and looked very solemn. He patted his friend's shoulder. "Good God !" he muttered. "Not insured, eh ?"

He took one or two paces up and down and came back. "What can I do, old man?"

"Can you lend me two hundred and fifty pounds, Paul? I'll pay you back one day."

Mr. Journée passed his hand through his hair. After a brief pause he said:

"Yes, of course."

He did not tell his wife about this when he got home. He could not lend £250 and go to Italy as well. The situation was grave. Poor old Justin! Another vague hope crept to the back of his mind. Anthony! It was the boy's father-in-law, and, after all, he was doing very well now. Perhaps he might help the old man a little. Why shouldn't he?

After supper Mr. Journée said he was going out for a stroll. He put on his hat, and took a bus. He found Laura alone making some mysterious baby garment. He kissed her, and after the usual formalities, said:

"Where's Anthony?"

Laura bent over her work, and speaking with perfect control, replied:

"Anthony? Oh, he's gone off to Italy with some friends of his."

Italy! . . .

XVI.

Anthony wrote to Laura from Italy. He described Venice as "a common little bourgeois swamp, overrun with trippers." Florence bored

him. Rome was on a par with Birmingham. He seemed to spend most of his time at Milan, studying some new school of painting that had sprung up there. Though with whom he had gone, and with whom he was staying, he did not reveal.

He was away four months, and the trip might be described as Anthony's last phase. Further successes, both financial and social, had come to him. He became frankly egocentric, a creature living in abstractions that recognized no moral or social code. Laura never told him of her father's loss, and when Mr. Journée, trying to sympathize with her in her position, deplored what he called "the set" that the boy had drifted into, she turned on him very fiercely. "After all," she said, "they are his people. They understand him and like him. It is the world he belongs to."

She hid her grief in the little claims of her home, and the laughter of her son. And Mr. Journée hid his in his work, and in the genial satisfaction of setting an old friend on his feet. He still did his breathing exercises, smoked his pipe, and walked in the park. The air seemed sweet and good. The little grandson was an eternal joy—— "People have queer ways of seeking happiness," he said at random one day to old Justin.

When Anthony eventually returned, the change in him was apparent and striking. From the shy,

self-conscious young man, he had developed into a cynical poseur. He was superficial, patronizing, and bored. Laura was a middle-aged matron, slopping about the house. He found his home disgusting—all baby and cooking. He met the family in the evening, and talked languidly of his experiences and successes. The names of countesses and men of genius were ever on his lips. At the same time he seemed afraid to be alone with his father. Mr. Journée asked him over to the shop to have a talk. He promised to go, but never turned up. He disappeared a few days later. And the mind of Laura registered this reflection :

"He will never come back. It was wicked of me to have married a man seven years younger than I."

She went about her work with calm deliberation. Colin was going to be a splendid boy——

It was nearly two years, however, before the inevitable happened. He came occasionally, and would sometimes send her a spasmodic cheque. And then one day there came a letter, obviously dictated by a lawyer, and enclosing a receipted hotel bill. She was glad that no one was present when the letter came. She turned quite white, and put it in her chatelaine. That evening she called on Mr. Journée at his shop, and showed him the letter. The old man put on his spectacles and read it, his hands trembling. And he took

her in his arms and held her close. There seemed nothing to say. They were just two creatures clinging together in the darkness for support.

"He wants me to divorce him, so I suppose I must," Laura reflected, but she did not discuss the matter with her family. She went to a lawyer and asked for the thing to be done as quietly and quickly as possible. It took a year, however, for the formalities to be arranged, and by that time Anthony was something of a notoriety, the divorce was mentioned in all the daily papers.

The climax filled Mr. Journée with dull anger, like an outrage on his own personal pride. It seemed in some strange way incomprehensible, meaningless. He brooded upon it all day. And when the men had gone in the evening he poured out his troubles to old Lintot.

"I feel I'm wrong, Lintot. I'm somehow responsible. What have I done that makes me deserve this? He was a good boy. I educated him. I did what I thought was the very best always for him. It seemed as though he couldn't be happy. He hadn't the faculty. I doubt whether he's happy now. Whether he ever could be—that's the great trouble."

Old Lintot regarded his master thoughtfully. A dank cigarette hung from the corner of his heavily bearded mouth. He twisted it and wriggled it from one side to the other. At last he put on his hat and shuffled towards the door.

With his hand on the latch, he turned and said in a melancholy voice :

" A man who doesn't believe in things, guv'nor, never finds happiness."

He added : " Good-night !" rather jerkily, as though afraid to trust his voice.

XVII.

Believe in things ! Was the old man right ? Was that perhaps just the trouble ? You can educate the mind, but you cannot educate the heart. You can believe in things yourself, but can you teach others to do so ? The boy had been bored with Italy ! Italy ? no, he knew that he would never go there now. The time had passed. But he could still walk with Leonardo through the squares of Florence. He could gaze reverently at the Duomo, and listen to the chanting of priests. He could be at one with all the masters of the past, because, without knowing, he desired so much to contribute in his humble way to their tradition. And at night he could creep through the olive groves, and gaze up at the stars, and feel the majesty of life pour through him. Across the valley he could hear the silver tinkle of a bell in some remote campanile. And he could be happy, because he loved it all, the beauty of the world, and the great soul that moved behind its mysterious purposes.

He thought that he would never see his son again, but he did just once. It was five years later, and he came to borrow money. He had married a French woman, and was living at Mentone. The Vortex School was a little out of date. He had been gambling, and got into the hands of money-lenders. His rich friends seemed to have deserted him. In a state of despair he had come to London, and sought out his father. He called at the workshop, quite casually one evening, as though it were the most ordinary thing in the world to call and borrow £500. His face was lined, haggard, and furtive. Mr. Journée had often visualized the coming of his son. He had rehearsed in his mind the things he meant to say. He had not forgotten Laura's dictum: "After all, they are his people. They understand him and like him. It is the world he belongs to." He had meant to be magnanimous, forgiving. We can none of us quite help being what we are, perhaps.

But with his son before him, he could think of none of the things he wished to say. There arose between them again that solid wall of unfamiliar experience. He felt that anything he said the young man would either not understand, or consider banal and worthless. His clever sophisticated face rebelled any approach to emotional comprehension. He talked glibly of certain vague securities, and spoke of the loan as of a quite

temporary arrangement. Mr. Journée lent him £100. He could not afford more. He had been keeping Laura for years, and there was the grandson's future to consider. He did not resent this. The responsibility enlarged his horizon. He accepted Anthony's worth at Laura's valuation. But he would not give him more than a hundred.

Just as he was going he noticed a strange expression on his son's face. He looked around the workshop, at the carved panels and friezes, the charcoal drawings, and the workmen's tools. He seemed to sniff the wood, and suddenly gave his father a keen hungry glance. And in that glance the father became aware of a salient fact. *The boy was envious of him!* Not only that, but somewhere deep down in him he loved his father. He had drugged the passion, but it was there.

Mr. Journée wanted to say: "Anthony, my boy, speak to me. Tell me all about yourself. What are you really thinking? What are you really feeling? Speak to me! Speak to me!"

But he merely blotted and handed him the cheque. The young man took it and put it in his pocket-book, with a hang-dog air. He said: "Thanks awfully, father," and shuffled towards the door.

Mr. Journée watched him go. He heard the latch click, and the door shut. Then he heard the footsteps clattering down the iron-clamped

stairs. When the footsteps had nearly reached the bottom, he suddenly raised his head and cried hoarsely: "Anthony! come back! . . . Come back!"

But he heard the front door shut, and the footsteps die away across the yard. And the old man buried his face in his hands.

XVIII.

Colin was ten years old. He went to school. On Sundays he always accompanied his two grandfathers on their weekly walk in Regent's Park. He had accepted the familiar explanation about his father having "gone on a long journey" with complete acquiescence. He seldom asked about him now. Laura also found that she could talk about her husband dispassionately. She rather liked to talk about him to Mr. Journée. She could see that the old man was still troubled, and it somehow helped him to hear her talk about his son. She called him "Father Paul." Once when he was deploring the boy's behaviour, she said:

"I can't altogether blame him, Father Paul. We are all made differently. It's a curious thing that on those few occasions when he took me out to visit those friends of his, I liked him better than at any other time. He was quite natural there, and, somehow, so charming and entertaining. I

could not mix with his friends, and he knew it. It was unfortunate that he—well, that he married me, more than anything else. He loved me in a way. I fitted in with a certain mood. He needed me. But love with him was not a personal thing so much as a condition. He slipped out of that mood and he didn't need me. The trouble with him was that—unlike you—he had no faculty for happiness."

Mr. Journée regarded her thoughtfully. Happiness! that was just what old Lintot had said. Something like that—about believing in things. He said: "You're a brave girl, Laura."

One October, Mrs. Journée got her feet wet marketing. The next day she developed a chill, which lasted for some days. It was practically cured, when, probably through cleaning out a cupboard in a draughty loft, it recurred with renewed violence. The following night she developed pneumonia, and a doctor was sent for. For days she lay in a critical condition.

Mr. Journée's distress was pitiful to watch. He would sometimes dart over to his workshop, but in half an hour he would be back. He wandered about the house helplessly, picking things up and putting them down again. He would go into his wife's bedroom, clutch her hand, and murmur:

"Well, mother?"

He would look at the medicine bottles, and finger them nervously, as though appealing to them, or accusing them of inertia. Then he would wander about the room on tiptoe, making curious little noises of distress like a wounded animal.

Laura—who at that time had given up her house, and was living with her parents again—came in and took up her abode. She relieved the night nurse, who had been called in. On the second day the doctor said to her :

"The situation is very grave."

At dinner-time that day Mr. McGrath called to make inquiries. As he was leaving he said to Laura :

"I see in the paper, my dear, that Anthony is in London. Look ! he is staying with—with his wife at this address."

Laura mechanically looked at the paper. After her father had gone this information that Anthony was in London kept interrupting her thoughts. Anthony no longer meant anything to her that mattered. But this was his mother. It was of Mr. Journée that she kept thinking. There was Anthony within a cab ride of his dying mother. There was Mr. Journée blindly groping for comfort and sympathy from all the world. . . .

When evening came she had arrived at a decision. The night nurse relieved her at eight o'clock. She would put her pride in her pocket

and go to him. When she was leaving she looked in on Mr. Journée who was standing in front of a neglected fire in the dining-room. She kissed him and said :

"I may come back later, Father Paul."

He kissed her lightly, and answered in a preoccupied manner :

"No, no, my dear, you look so tired and pale. Go to bed ! Go to bed ! It will be all right."

She pressed his arm and said confidently : "You must still believe, Father Paul. We expect you to believe——"

She went away hurriedly, and after a search she found a cab, and told the driver to go to a certain address on Chelsea Embankment. The evening was cold and foggy. The cab crept round corners, and was continually being blocked in the traffic. The journey seemed interminable. She set her teeth and clutched the window strap.

At last they pulled up at a little white house. She paid the driver, and he began to abuse her because she only gave him a threepenny tip. She blushed confusedly. She was so unaccustomed to taking cabs that she did not know. She wanted to say : "Please, please, not to-night——"

She hurriedly gave him another shilling, and went up to the door and rang the bell. After a time the door was opened by a solemn-looking butler. She asked for Mr. Anthony Journée.

The man had a strange scared expression on his face.

He seemed uncertain how to act. He let her in and left her standing in the hall without a word. The house seemed to smell of some curious odour she could not recognize. In a room on the right she heard a woman behaving hysterically. She was left alone for two or three minutes, and then two burly-looking men came out to her. They ushered her into another room, and looked at her searchingly. The elder said :

"Will you tell me who you are, madam?"

She answered quickly : "Does it matter? I have come from Mr. Journée's father. His mother is seriously ill."

The two men looked at each other, and the same speaker replied quietly :

"Mr. Anthony Journée is dead! He was murdered this afternoon by a woman!"

Laura was conscious of some strong underlying power forcing her to a surprising degree of control. She thought instinctively of her son, and then of old Mr. Journée pacing that lonely room in front of the neglected fire. There were others to fight for. She must not think of herself.

As he spoke the man handed her a card, and she just glimpsed the fact that he was a police inspector. She felt terribly undecided how to act —what to ask. She heard the voices of a man

and woman almost screaming at each other in the hall. The door opened abruptly. The man and woman entered. The man was a foreigner of some sort, with a sallow skin, and a black moustache. The woman was also obviously a foreigner, with a dead white skin, and unnaturally glittering eyes, which she was mopping with a handkerchief. She was exclaiming :

"I don't believe it ! I don't believe it ! I was at Amalfi all the time. He never met her there——"

She caught sight of Laura, and ejaculated : "Oh, mon Dieu !"

The man was saying :

"I don't know, Mimi. Why do you bully me ? It is only the Contesse's word——"

The two police inspectors stood up. Suddenly the woman looked at Laura again, a new light coming into her eyes. She screamed out :

"Oh, how funny ! Do you know who this is ? This is his wife—his first wife !"

She went off into hysterical laughter, and snapped her fingers in Laura's face. The scent from her handkerchief mingled with that other more penetrating smell. The man, the woman, and the police inspectors all seemed to be talking at the same time. She heard unfamiliar names flung about, threats, menaces. Out of the confusion she sensed some sordid episode, which is generously spoken of as the *crime passionelle*.

The whole thing seemed terribly unreal. It was as though she had stepped from moving reality straight into a film.

She turned to the police inspector as to the one stable thing in a reeling world, and said quite calmly :

"I presume I may go?"

Her placidity appeared to anger the Frenchwoman. She spat at her, abused her, and called her names. The two inspectors intervened, and ushered her quickly from the room.

When out in the air she nearly fainted. She rested for a time on an embankment seat, and watched the river.

"So that was the end of it," she thought. "My poor Anthony!"

She choked back a little sob, the only personal indulgence she had allowed herself that night, and hailed a cab.

She found Mr. Journée up, and when she saw him she knew that he had good news. He clutched her hands, and said eagerly :

"Laura, Laura girl, the doctor says he thinks the crisis is past. She will get better, please God!"

She stayed with him an hour, watching him gradually calm down.

"Poor Father Paul!" she thought, "your anguish for the night is not yet over."

It would be in all the papers in the morning.

Even if he did not see it, someone would tell him. It were better that she told him herself.

When he seemed quite calm, she said softly :

"Father Paul, I have bad news for you."

She got up and turned the light very low. She somehow felt that it was easier to say what she had to in the dark. Going close up to him and resting her face on his shoulder, she said :

"Anthony is dead!"

And then she wept tempestuously. She made no attempt to restrain her tears. She wanted him to feel that she relied on him. That the pity for himself would be submerged in that greater pity of which he had so inexhaustible a store.

When she had spent herself she lay inertly against him ready to succour him in any way he needed. They remained silent for a long while. At last he sighed and murmured :

"That fellow was right, you know, Laura, that fellow was right."

"What fellow, Father Paul?"

"That fellow who said, 'Each man kills the thing he loves.' Come, my dear, kiss me good-night."

XIX.

It was Colin's twelfth birthday, and five other children were invited to the birthday party. There was a great to-do. The tea-table was laden with cakes and bonbons. In the centre was

a large cake covered with pink icing on which was modelled in white, "C. J., 12 years."

Mr. Journée had come home very early. He was in a great state of excitement, running from one room to another, calling out:

"Now then, mother, anything I can do, my dear? Where are those candles? Colin, Colin! God bless my soul! I don't believe the boy has washed his face yet! Scaramouche! come along, hurry up! They'll all be here soon. What did I do with that parcel I brought in? Laura, Laura! have you seen a large brown-paper parcel?"

The children arrived, all a little shy of each other. They glanced furtively at the cakes, and then at each other. The tea began in almost sepulchral silence, so far as they were concerned. Only Mr. Journée kept up a running fire of badinage. A bonbon popped. A small girl began to giggle. One boy pushed another off a chair (roars of laughter)! In a few minutes the fun was fast and furious. The tea finished in a din, all the children wearing paper caps. A move was made into the other room, and games began. Coloured air-balloons were banged hither and thither, to the detriment of sundry vases and pieces of furniture. They played musical chairs and postman's knock, and a curious game invented by Mr. Journée called "Squidge," in which everyone had to imitate an animal of some sort.

Old Lintot came in later. He had a niece there, and he stood on the fringe of the party smiling amusedly. Laura brought him some tea, and talked to him.

Suddenly she said: "Look at Father Paul! Isn't he wonderful?"

He was at that particular moment being an elephant, and two small boys were riding on his back. His eyes were bright, and he was totally immersed in the game. A few minutes later he was a lion roaring under the piano. Old Lintot said:

"I've known him thirty-five years, Mrs. Laura."

He meditatively bit a piece of seed cake, and added:

"He's a genius, Mrs. Laura. If you know what I mean, he has the greatest genius of all, the genius for happiness. He's not afraid of letting himself feel things, even if they make him suffer. He is always seeing, you know, what the old poet spoke of 'sermons in stones, books in the running brooks, good in everything.' It's the one thing really worth while. It's when a man loses the child in himself that he goes wrong."

The old man flicked some crumbs from his beard, muttering: "Excuse me!" Then he looked at Laura, as though doubting whether he hadn't been a little tactless. He put down his teacup, and said:

"Of course, it's no good blaming anyone. We are all fearfully and wonderfully made—a fine boy that of yours."

Laura suddenly plucked him by the sleeve.

"Come into the other room a moment, Mr. Lintot," she whispered.

When they arrived there, she said:

"You have been such an old friend of—of everyone's, Mr. Lintot. Did Father Paul ever tell you the little incident about poor Anthony's will?"

"No, no. He did not."

"He left a will on half a sheet of notepaper. It was made many, many years ago, when he was at the height of his success. He left it with a lawyer. It simply said: 'I leave everything I may possess when I die to my son Colin. May he be more like my father than like me.' The lawyer told me he brought it to him one evening when he was very drunk. He made him put it away in a safe, and promise to act on it when he died."

Old Lintot nodded. He murmured:

"Ah! Yes, yes, I understand. Truth in the cup! It's very strange how this 'leperous distilment' will sometimes make a man see truth when all else fails. And has the lawyer acted on it?"

Laura shrugged her shoulders.

"Poor boy! his only legacy was debts and

debts and debts. But, oh! that little gesture flung out on a drunken night. . . ."

"It made your father happy I'll be bound."

"Yes, father always believed in him, you see."

The old man took her arm, leading her back to the party. His voice was almost inaudible as he repeated:

"Yes, yes, we're fearfully and wonderfully made. It's no good blaming anyone—thank you for your confidence, Mrs. Laura."

FUNERAL MARCH

SHE was a woman with a genius for apparent helplessness. She drifted around the verandah of the Hotel Reina Christa like an autumn leaf, and like an autumn leaf she was for ever changing her hue. She was always wearing different-coloured cloaks and shawls, which other people had to fetch for her. Not only men, but women. She was so helpless, you see. To me she was like a white flower, which one is only conscious of at night. One associated her with the night—the dead white face with the little flick of carmine on the lips, the blue-black hair, and those large, dark appealing eyes. She was always appealing, appealing for sympathy and understanding—and anything else. She seemed to give out nothing of herself. She was nebulous. But in my whole life I have never met anyone such a complete mistress of the verb to *schwarm*. It is a pity there is no real translation for this word, for she embodied it in her every phrase and movement. The women, who were for the most part middle-aged English and American women, staying there for health or pleasure, entirely succumbed to her.

They found her most fascinating. She certainly could be amusing at times, and she had travelled a lot, and seen sides of life that appeared entirely romantic and remote to most of them. Moreover, she was Russian, which means so much when you are susceptible to mystic influences.

The men, I noticed, were a little afraid of her, but as they were men whose activities centred principally around golf and bridge it is not surprising. They did not like being asked about their souls, and when their physical beauty was praised openly before a crowd of people they felt self-conscious. But some of them seemed to like to sit and talk with her—alone. There was one young sub—just out of the shell, with some of the yolk still on his hair—who became apparently wildly infatuated. He devoted not only his evenings but many of the precious hours when he might have been playing golf to her. The frenzy lasted for ten days, and suddenly the pale youth disappeared. Poor Madame Vieninoff wandered the grounds disconsolately.

"Oh, my poor dear Geoffrey," she said to everyone. "What has happened to him? He was so sweet!—so sweet!"

She was discovered the same evening probing under the lilies on the pond beyond the pergola with a walking-stick. I think it was a disappointment to her not to discover that pale face floating amongst them. She was *so* helpless.

It must have been an even greater disappointment when it transpired that the young man had just remembered that he was down to play in a golf tournament in a town fifteen miles away, and he had not had time to let her know. She soon, however, recovered from this. To that frumpy old Mrs. Wyatt she would exclaim: "Oh, my darling, how *beautiful* you look tonight! You must always wear cerise and black. What exquisite pearls! They are like your eyes, floating in the ether."

To little Mrs. Champneys she would say:

"Oh, my darling, come and talk to me. I am *so* lonely. You are *so sympathique.*"

And she would tell Mrs. Champneys all about her dear beloved husband, who she said had been a great musician, and had died many years ago. She would sap this poor little woman's nervous vitality with her moving stories of love, and death, and passion, with her tales of suffering, interlarded with little flicks of cynical humour. She could blow hot and cold too. She was heard one evening screaming at her maid in French, on account of some trivial ill-adjustment of her frock. She sulked for an afternoon because a pretty woman named Viola Winch had occupied the whole of old Colonel Gouchard's time during *déjeuner.*

But for the most part she had it all her own way. There was little opposition. She was never

so happy as when surrounded by some dozen of the hotel habitués listening to her stories, or absorbing her charm.

It was during one of these occasions that I noticed a strange little occurrence. The evening train used to come in while the guests were at dinner, consequently the new arrivals usually dined alone, and either did or did not join the others afterwards.

I was seated in a chair on the verandah facing the dining-room obliquely. Madame Vieninoff was the centre of an admiring group as usual. I had never heard her so entertaining. The French door to the dining-room was open, and I observed an elderly distinguished-looking man with white hair and a pointed beard—one of the late-comers —dining alone. He was obviously tired from a long journey and in need of his dinner, which he enjoyed with the quiet satisfaction of a gourmet. He was nearing the end, and had raised a glass of wine to his lips, when I suddenly observed him stop, as though listening. He put the glass down, and frowned perplexedly, as though trying to associate what he was listening to with some past experience. Then he finished his wine and pondered. After a few more minutes he stood up and came to the open door, where I was sitting, and looked out on to the verandah at the group of people. I saw his eye alight on Madame Vieninoff, and a curious cynical smile

twisted his lips. He returned to finish his dinner. I could not see in the dim light whether she had observed him, but I noticed as he went back she was laughing rather hysterically at some reminiscence that she had herself been recounting. Then she became curiously subdued.

When the elderly gentleman came out to partake of his coffee and cognac, Madame Vieninoff had retired. She said the night was oppressive, and was affecting her nerves. I thought to myself: "Ho, ho!" which is another way of saying that we all love a mystery.

I made a point of engaging the newcomer in conversation, although, of course, it was impossible at the moment to talk about Madame Vieninoff. We talked about hotels, and the country, and sport, and other safe subjects which hotel guests interminably discuss. He was a quiet, cultivated Frenchman, prepared to be friendly, but not too communicative—not a man to be rushed or cross-examined. We retired early.

The next two days wrought an extraordinary change in Madame Vieninoff. There was no disguising it. She still drifted about the verandah, but it was in a furtive uncertain manner. She appeared petulant and no one could get a smile out of her. She was obviously, moreover, in dread of finding herself in the

presence of this new arrival. She kept her room for hours, and sent her maid for time-tables, or to make enquiries at the bureau about the departure of trains to here, there, and everywhere, which was surprising, as she had told everyone that she meant to winter at the Reina Christa. The poor woman was in great distress, and it became apparent to my friend, whose name I discovered to be Louis Denoyel. Everyone observed that Madame Vieninoff was not herself, but I doubt whether anyone else, except myself, associated her agitation with the arrival of Monsieur Denoyel. On the third afternoon she came on to the verandah, where I was drinking coffee with Denoyel. She glanced at us and darted away.

Denoyel frowned, and the cynical smile left his face. He stroked his beard, shrugged his shoulders, and muttered :

"Perhaps it's too bad ! After all she's a woman !"

He looked up at me quizzically, and I said :

"All of which I find intriguing."

He thought for a long while. Then he took out a visiting card, wrote something on it, and rang the bell for the waiter. When the waiter came he said :

"Bring me an envelope, please, and I would like you to take this message to Madame Vieninoff."

The waiter was away for nearly five minutes, and I sat there anxiously hoping that my friend would show me what was written on the card. He was amused at my curiosity, and in a sudden whim he handed it across to me without a word. On it was written in French :

" Do not be alarmed. I am leaving to-morrow morning.—L. D."

When the waiter had taken the message, I said :

" Well, sir, you cannot leave it at that."

He lightly beat a tattoo on the table with his left hand, and then he said :

" No, I suppose, having gone so far, I must tell you the whole thing. But wait till this evening, and we will go out for a stroll along the bay."

The night was warm and fine, and seated on the carcass of a fallen pine tree at the edge of the dunes, just above the bay, Monsieur Denoyel told me this story :

" It's a strange story," he said, " because it is a series of contradictions. But all true stories manage somehow or other to contradict themselves ; life is like that, I suppose.

" In the days when the ill-fated Romanoffs flourished and Imperial Russia was a force to be

reckoned with, Serge Vieninoff was a musician of some repute in Petersburg. He was inclined to be lazy and had accomplished nothing very distinguished, but people were beginning to talk of his future. He had a considerable private fortune, and kept up a certain amount of style in the most fashionable quarter of the city. He was popular, amiable, and cultured. And then one day he met and fell in love with Wanda Karrienski. She was the daughter of a small innkeeper, and was at that time serving as a manicurist in one of the big stores. That is our friend across the way.''

And Monsieur Denoyel nodded in the direction of the Reina Christa, whose lights were reflected upon the still surface of the bay.

'' She was of the clinging, helpless, passionate kind, exuding an atmosphere of ingenuousness ; but, as you yourself may easily divine, not quite so ingenuous, indeed, not quite so helpless as she appears. She made every kind of apparent protest against marrying the aristocratic Serge. She was of a different class, unworthy, too unsophisticated, and all that kind of thing. Oh, she did the thing well. It was just the kind of attitude which infatuated the musician. He would have none of it, and he married her.

'' Now you can imagine, coming from the hard conditions in which she had been brought up, and the struggle and indignity of her calling—

for you must realize that a female manicurist in Petersburg in those days did not hold the same kind of position as a manicurist holds in London or New York. Her work was mostly connected with young officers. Suddenly finding herself the mistress of a large and fashionable household, and the legitimate wife of a distinguished and wealthy man—well, what could you expect?

"It was the kind of thing she had dreamed of, and read about in cheap novels, but never considered realizable. And suddenly the dream came true. She adapted herself to these conditions like a duck to water. As you may observe she is still by no means unlovely, and in those days she was an extremely pretty woman. Moreover, she had a certain native wit, and that most invaluable asset to any woman—the genius of knowing exactly how to dress. In spite of her lowly birth, Vieninoff's friends quickly absorbed her. She became popular and sought after. Her life became one round of dissipation, balls, theatres, dinners, sleigh rides, receptions, and all the gay things which a woman of her nature craves for. Vieninoff couldn't live up to it. He was a dreamer, absorbed in his work; and for the most part he let her go her own way, although devoted to her.

"There were two years of this, and then suddenly—biff! War, revolution, fall of the monarchy, counter-revolution, defeat, ruin! The

whole edifice fell to the ground, and among the débris wandered the disconsolate figures of Vieninoff and his wife. He was ruined. The house and furniture was seized by the Bolshevik government, his property was confiscated. Scraping together whatever they could out of the shambles, they managed eventually to reach Paris with a few thousand francs between them and actual starvation.

"They rented two rooms in a meagre little street just off the Rue des Écoles. It was a wretched place, insufferably hot in the summer, perishingly cold in the winter. But Mr. Vieninoff was a man of spirit. He got together the few treasures they had saved out of the wreck, and spent a portion of his small capital in hiring an upright piano. 'I will teach,' he said. 'I will write and make money. I will rise like a Phœnix. Courage, my little cabbage!'

"To Wanda it was—just hell! For a time she appeared dazed by the whole thing. She had been genuinely frightened, and experienced a certain sense of relief in escaping with her life. But when she began to settle down and realize the situation, the reaction was violent. She found herself cooped up in these two wretched rooms with a man who did nothing but tinkle on a piano, or scribble on sheets of paper. She wandered the streets and found a city larger and gayer than Petersburg. She saw magnificent shops, motor-

cars, restaurants, theatres, cabarets, and dancing-halls. She saw gay parties of people on their way to these places, and the sight made her eat her heart out. She did not believe in her husband or his ridiculous music. She felt she had been deceived and wronged. She turned against him, and vent all her pent-up spleen upon the unfortunate musician. 'I married an old fool,' she would tell him. 'Oh, my God! all my brilliance thrown away on a nincompoop who thinks he's a genius! Oh, fool that I am!'

"Vieninoff struggled on. He managed to get a few pupils, sons and daughters of tradespeople, who paid badly and were very stupid. They came and went, came and went. He just managed to pay the rent, and buy the barest necessities of life for them both. When not teaching he spent his whole time trying to compose, and for this reason he was happier than his wife. She did nothing but sit about, nag her husband, and urge him to get work that brought in more money.

"He was always optimistic. He believed that better times would come, that he would be appreciated, but nothing happened. The years went by, and their position became only worse. And then Mr. Vieninoff began to cough. And he coughed, and coughed, and something told him that the end was not far off, and the knowledge brought with it an element of relief. For as he

coughed so did Wanda become more intolerant and abusive. It was bad enough to have a poor husband, but a sick one was even worse.

"She began to prepare for her husband's death. When he died she would sell that wretched piano, and the few sticks of furniture, burn his musical manuscripts, and try and get back to her beloved Russia. Or perhaps she would marry again, a rich man this time and a brilliant one. Perhaps she would stop in Paris. There were many rich men in Paris—Americans, English, Italian. What did it matter? She had not yet lost her looks. She became quite eager for her husband's death. She even did not hesitate to discuss it with him, to jibe at him, and asked him what provision he had made when he deserted her!"

Monsieur Denoyel threw the stump of his cigar far away across the sand with an angry gesture. It whipped the night air like a firefly, and settled behind some scrub. Then leaning forward on his stick he continued:

"Vieninoff had been very good to his wife. In the early days he had loved her passionately. When everything went wrong he had stuck to her. In their material distress he had thought more of her than of himself. When they were practically starving it was never she who went without. But lying on his bed towards the end of his days he suddenly realized with vivid

intensity the kind of woman she was. A slow anger and resentment began to burn within him. In fair weather she had been all smiles and charm, in foul she proved herself utterly callous and heartless. He felt a desire to punish her in some way. But what could he do? It was perhaps bad enough to leave her nearly penniless. That alone would have been intolerable if she had loved him and been good to him. But he knew that when he died she would not be penniless for long. She was not that kind of woman. She would dance upon his grave. She would forget him, or cherish his memory as an ugly nightmare. Lying there in the darkness he went over and over again the tragic horror of the situation. It stirred him at strange angles. It even aroused the musician in him. Sombre musical phrases pounded through his brain. *He would write his own funeral march!* Moreover, it should be played at his own funeral at all costs. It seemed the only thing left to him—a dignified gesture with which to leave the world. The thought almost made him chuckle with anticipation and glee.

"When she asked him the next day what he was doing he replied: 'I'm writing my masterpiece.' She sneered at him and went out. Mr. Vieninoff was very busy for weeks after that. He never left his room. And then one day he pulled himself together, and putting on an old

hat on which the dust was very thick, he crawled out and visited a notary in an adjoining street. 'I want to make my will,' he said. He gave a careful detailed list of all his belongings, and explained that on his death these were to be immediately sold and the money set aside to defray the expenses of a band employed to accompany him to the grave. And the band was to play his own funeral march.

"'Yes,' said the notary. 'And what about your wife?'

"'I leave her the residue of the estate,' he said with a low chuckle.

"'And what does that amount to?'

"Mr. Vieninoff shrugged his shoulders.

"'Oh,' he replied, 'there are my manuscripts.'

"The notary probably thought he was a lunatic. But there it is. The law's the law. The will was duly drawn up and signed. Having accomplished this feat Mr. Vieninoff's grip on life appeared to cease. He died quietly one evening a few weeks later. He was quite alone when the end came, his wife being out at a cabaret with a woman friend."

Monsieur Denoyel lighted another cigar. The windows of some of the upper rooms at the Reina Christa were beginning to add their reflections to the pattern on the bay, suggesting that the early people were already retiring. The deep

melodious cry of a brown owl reached us from a long way off across the dunes. My informant coughed, and appeared a little uncertain how to complete the picture he was conjuring up. At last he said :

" Paris is essentially a city of the unexpected. One should never be surprised at anything one sees or hears there. But Mr. Vieninoff's funeral was surely one of the most surprising spectacles that ever appeared in that surprising city. Madame Vieninoff had heard nothing about the will, and, as you may imagine, when the notary appeared and read the terms of it to her she was furious. Vieninoff had left her nothing but the premeditated bonfire of his manuscripts. Madame Myrthil, the landlady of the establishment, declared that in a moment of hysterical rage Madame Vieninoff had actually struck her dead husband with a roll of music. But let us prefer to believe that this was an exaggeration. In any case she found herself in a helpless position. Monsieur Pitau, the notary, was a dry old stick, but he was very efficient, and he performed his duties with meticulous care. His trouble was being so pressed for time. It appeared that Mr. Vieninoff had bought the piano on the hire purchase system, and it was now his property. This, of course, made a considerable difference, and when everything was sold he found that the estate realized several

thousand francs. And this money he had to spend on a band!

"A band! Monsieur Pitau knew nothing about bands. How to hire a band? So the day before the funeral he went to a friend who conducted an orchestra in a café in the Boulevard Poissonnière. This gentleman was a violinist conducting an orchestra of four. But that wasn't sufficient. Monsieur Pitau wanted a *band,* a large band to play a funeral march in the streets. He was prepared to spend several thousand francs. The violinist said good, leave it to him. The next morning there assembled in a little yard off the Rue des Écoles the strangest band you can possibly imagine. There were the four musicians from the café wearing a curious green semi-military fustian which was their accustomed uniform. There were seven or eight students from the Conservatoire with piccolos, clarionets, flutes, and saxaphones. There were two drummers from an infantry regiment, and several other odd people who had surely never had a musical instrument in their hands before. The parts were handed round, and of course there was no time for a rehearsal.

"When the hearse arrived, the conductor drew his strange company up into some kind of order. The perfectly plain coffin was covered with a black pall on which reposed one wreath of immortelles. There were no mourners, although

Madame Vieninoff followed the band, as though wildly hoping that even yet something might be extracted from this exhibition of lunacy.

"The cavalcade started, and the band struck up. Now the conductor, who played the violin, was some kind of a musician, and he made a serious attempt to interpret the themes of the dead composer. But the same cannot be said of the others. They began solemnly marching down the Boulevard St. Michel. A crowd quickly began to collect. And everyone was saying: 'Whose funeral is this? What is this band? What are they playing?' No one could give an answer. By the time they had crossed the river and reached the Grand Boulevards thousands were following, and the band had got quite out of hand. They had entirely lost all sense of a composition. There never was heard such a raging cacophony, such a screaming riot of discord. Long before they reached Montmartre the students were ragging the whole thing. The saxaphone was wailing little bits of jazz, the flute interlarding passages from vulgar popular songs. The people were roaring with laughter, refusing to believe that it was a real funeral at all. It was only the conductor and the two military drummers who lent to the performance any sense of rhythm at all. So great was the congestion that before Montmartre Cemetery was reached a large body of police was telephoned for to keep

the people in order. There was very nearly a riot. And in any case it led to an inquiry, which cost the country thousands of francs. And thus it was that poor Mr. Vieninoff went to his last resting-place, and Madame Vieninoff received her punishment.''

Monsieur Denoyel stood up.

''Let us stroll back,'' he said, ''and I will tell you perhaps the strangest part of the story on the way. The affair, as you may imagine, got into the newspapers. It made what the papers call a 'story,' a good 'story' too. It occupied a prominent place on the front page of not only all the French newspapers, but of the English and American. There was something which captured the imagination in an unknown composer writing his own funeral march, and going to his grave to the strains of it.

''While the public interest was still hot on it, an astute publisher had the wit to publish the composition with the 'story' printed on the cover. And then, of course, the most surprising thing of all happened. Someone quite by chance showed a copy to Monsieur Taillandier, the conductor of the Philharmonic orchestra. That gentleman glanced through it idly, and then his interest became aroused. He took it home and studied it. And suddenly he exclaimed to his wife: 'But this is a most interesting and original composition!'

"You have already no doubt anticipated what was to follow. Monsieur Taillandier sought information about this composer and his work, and he was referred to Monsieur Pitau, who passed him on to the widow. One afternoon, he called on Madame Vieninoff. He found her surveying an enormous mass of music manuscripts piled up on the stove. There were tears of anger in her eye, and a box of matches in her hand.

"'What are you doing, madame?' he inquired.

"'I'm trying to destroy the relics of a wasted life,' she blazed at him. 'And the filthy stuff won't burn. It's too thick.'

"Monsieur Taillandier snatched a bundle from the heated stove. The edges of the music were charred. It was his turn to be angry.

"'Imbecile!' he screamed at her.

"She did not, of course, know who he was, and she became even angrier. They had a bad quarter of an hour, till at last he was able to persuade her that the music might not only be good, but it might have some commercial value. This altered the whole case. She allowed him to come later with a secretary and sort the music out. A musical agent was called in to deal with it. Monsieur Taillandier proved himself a sound judge, but he never for a moment anticipated the surprising results of his discovery. A lot of the work was immature, particularly that done

during his days of prosperity in Petersburg. But all his later work was surprisingly brilliant. He had written innumerable concertos, symphonies, and sonatas, to say nothing of songs, and piano solos. All these were published and performed, and a Vieninoff composition became quite a vogue. But the most profitable discovery for Madame Vieninoff was that of two light operas. One, called 'Licette'—which he must have written when he was starving—you have probably heard or heard of. It has been running simultaneously in Boston, Paris, and Vienna for nearly a year. The other is shortly to be produced."

"You mean to say," I ventured, "that Madame Vieninoff is a comparatively rich woman, all through her husband's despised compositions?"

Monsieur Denoyel shrugged his shoulders. "She winters here at the Reina Christa. She has her own maid. I have met her during the season at Cannes, and Pau, and Seville. She has not yet found it necessary to—marry her rich man."

We were approaching the wrought-iron entrance gate to the hotel.

"There is one mystery I cannot yet understand, monsieur," I said. "How is it that *you* know all the details of this affair?"

He pressed my arm confidentially.

"I was the doctor, monsieur, who attended

Vieninoff till the last. He told me all on his death-bed. I had the honour of being the only person to send him a final tribute—a wreath of immortelles. I am the only one who knows the whole truth. It is perhaps for this reason that Madame Vieninoff is—well, shall I say a little shy in my presence?"

We walked up the drive, and lo! there on the verandah in her favourite seat was Madame Vieninoff, surrounded by her satellites. I was conscious of a sudden wave of anger, the kind of anger which youth invariably feels in the face of injustice. She had not seen us, and I turned to my friend and whispered:

"You could make it very—unpleasant for her."

He smiled, and patted my shoulder.

"She is a woman," he said, as though this laconic phrase were sufficient to dismiss any form of passionate judgment. Then he held out his hand, and added: "Good-night. Do not let her disturb your dreams"; and he gave me a formal little bow and passed through the door and out of my life.

Disturb my dreams! No, she shouldn't disturb my dreams, but she was seriously disturbing my waking hours. Almost involuntarily I ambled in the direction of the verandah. I sat on a wooden bench below it, and I heard her talking, and these were the words which reached me;

"Ah, my poor dear Serge, there was a genius if ever there was one. Listen, darling, he would never have had the courage to persist had I not so often told him success would one day come to him. We were living in quite humble circumstances in those days, a small flat with only one servant. Poor Serge used to despair, but when things were at their blackest, I would take him by the hand and whisper: 'Courage, my dear one, one little step down the fickle road of destiny, and you will be there,' and I would lead him to the piano-stool. I was always at his elbow. I was the rock upon which he leant. During those long months when I nursed him night and day, he clung to me for support and inspiration. He died in my arms. 'Ah, my wife,' he whispered —and these were his last words—'my wife, my love—my inspiration.' Isn't it wonderful, darling, to have loved like that?"

A woman! Oh, my dear Monsieur Denoyel!

JUXTAPOSITIONS

"WHERE we are all mixed up," said my friend, Samuel Squidge, vigorously scraping down the "portrait of the artist, by himself," with a palette-knife, "is in our juxtapositions. It's all nonsense, I tell you. People talk about a bad colour. There's no such thing as a bad colour. Every colour is beautiful in its right juxtaposition. When you hear a woman say 'I hate puce,' or, 'I love green,' she might as well say 'I hate sky,' or, 'I love grass.' If she had seen puce used in a colour-print as Hiroshige the Second used it—green—fancy *loving* green! The idiot! Do you remember what Corot said? He said Nature was too green and too badly lighted. Now the old man was quite right——"

When Squidge starts talking in this strain he is rather apt to go off the deep end. I yawned and murmured sweetly:

"We were talking about Colin St. Clair Chasseloup."

"Exactly! And I'm trying to point out to you how, with Colin St. Clair Chasseloup, it's all a question of juxtapositions. You say that

Colin is a frozen drunkard, a surly bore, a high-pressure nonentity. Listen to me. We're all nice people, every one of us. Give a man the right air he should breathe, the right food he should eat, the right work he should do, the right people he should associate with, and he's a perfect dear, everyone of him. There isn't a real irreconcilable on the earth. But the juxta-position——"

"What has Chasseloup to complain of? He has money, a charming wife, children, a place in the country, a flat in town. He does exactly what he likes."

Squidge surveyed me with amazement.

"You ass! You prize ass! I thought you wrote about people. I thought you were supposed to understand people! And there you go and make a smug, asinine remark like that."

I blushed, fully conscious that Squidge was being justifiably merciless. It was an asinine statement, but then I was merely putting out a feeler, and I could not explain this to the portrait painter. After all, I did not really know St. Clair Chasseloup. He was only a club acquaintance, and a very unclubbable acquaintance he was. He appeared to dislike club life. To a stranger he seemed to reek of patrician intolerance. He was an aristocrat of aristocrats. His well set-up, beautifully groomed figure, clean-cut features,

well-poised head were all in the classic tradition of a ruling caste. It was only about the rather heavy eyelids and the restless mouth that one detected the cynic, the disappointed man, the disillusioned boor. Why? . . . It was no affair of mine, the secret troubles of this man's heart. But it was his business to behave himself to me decently. To hell with Colin St. Clair Chasseloup! I disliked the man. But then we all dislike people whom we feel nurture an innate sense of superiority to us. Added to this trying exterior of complete self-absorption and superiority, one had also to allow for the vanity of the cripple.

St. Clair Chasseloup had lost his right leg just below the knee. It happened before the war. Indeed, at the time when he was a naval cadet at Osborne, skylarking with other young cadets, he had slipped from a pinnace on a rough day and his right foot had been crushed against the stone wall of a jetty. The leg had to be amputated. That was the end of his naval career. And his father had been a commodore before him, and his father's father was in the Battle of Trafalgar, and so on right away back to the spacious days of Elizabeth—all naval men. Devilish bad luck, you may say! Of course, one had to allow for the bitterness that this misfortune must have produced. At the same time it doesn't excuse a man not answering when he's spoken to by a fellow-

member at the club, or for looking at one—like Chasseloup did !

Squidge's championship of the thwarted seaman amused me. You could not conceive a more remarkable contrast. I was not even aware that they knew each other. In spite of his missing limb, St. Clair Chasseloup was the kind of man who always looked as though he had just had a cold bath, done Swedish drill, and then passed through the hairdresser's on his way to your presence. He was aggressively fit. Squidge looked as though a walk to the end of the street would have brought on valvular disease of the heart. From the centre of a dank beard, limp ends of cigarettes eternally clung. Physically, he was just comic. It was his vivid eyes and his queer excitable voice that told you that he was a person of no mean vitality. He was just as sociable and optimistic as Chasseloup was taciturn and moribund. And yet they met on some odd plane, it appeared. Well, well, I could understand Squidge finding merit in Chasseloup, indeed in anyone, but what would Chasseloup's opinion of Squidge be? It made me shudder to contemplate. On the occasion I am recounting it was almost impossible to extract any further intimate details out of Squidge, for he had flown off on one of his pet theoretical tangents.

"It's a queer rum thing," he was saying, "why people ever get married at all. You

simply can't get level with it—the most unlikely, most outrageous combinations! The more outrageous the more likely they are to be a success. You see some scraggy goat of a woman and you think to yourself, 'Poor wretch! whatever sort of chance has she got of getting married?' and the next thing you hear is that she's married to some god who adores her, and they have a large family of boys at Harrow and girls at Girton. Queer! Another woman breathes sunlight and the men pursue her, and nothing happens. She's unhappy. I know a woman who is married to a man she is apparently in love with, and he with her. They have two jolly kids, a boy and a girl. They are a most delightful, happy family. They have money and are bursting with health and good spirits, and yet nearly every year the mother gets fits of melancholia, and has to go away to a nursing home and lie up for months. Some genius has said that when contemplating marriage, what you want to seek in common is not intellectual ambitions and tastes, it's recreations. It's quite right. Generally speaking, a man's at work all day, so is a woman. When they meet in the evening they want to get away from it. It's the time when they spread their feathers. If they can play and fool around they can be happy. Life for the most part is a drab monologue. It's when you came to the accents you want each other. . . . If you can share

the same tooth-brush with a woman for twenty-five years and she can still surprise you, then you're all right, both of you——''

"My dear Squidge, what has your disgusting notion with regard to the tooth-brush to do with St. Clair Chasseloup?''

"Nothing. I'm talking.''

"I noticed that. Tell me frankly. Would you say that he and his wife—Aimée, isn't it?—have recreations in common?''

"Yes.''

"What are they?''

"Bach.''

"Bach! what are you talking about? Colin St. Clair Chasseloup! Bach!''

"It seems funny to you, doesn't it? You know him and you've seen her. You know him, all beef and phlegm, the immovable mass. A man who thinks of nothing but dumb-bells and double Scotches. And you've seen her, the daughter of a hundred earls, highly strung, æsthetic, a little queer, passionately devoted to ultra-modern music, Coué, Montessori, anything and everything that crops up. They've nothing in common, you might say. He's out all day, playing a surly game of golf, or loafing in a club. She's playing the piano, Ravel, Debussy, or some of those queer Russian Johnnies. Or else she's inventing cute devices for the upbringing of the precious children. He lets them rip. She

spoils them. When you see them together you would say that they were two people who had just missed their last bus and had to walk home, each thinking it was the other's fault. And yet I tell you they are the only two people suitable to each other. They have a mutual appreciation of accents—the same accents. They meet in the solemn tonal climaxes of Bach——''

"I can't believe that Colin likes Bach."

"I didn't once. I found out through my pal, Paul Furtwangler, the 'cellist. He goes there several nights a week—she pays him well, too—and he just plays Bach. It soothes the savage beast. It keeps him at home, quietens him, stays his hand from the whisky bottle. It's marvellous. He can't abide Chopin, or all the jolly tuneful stuff barbarians like you and I enjoy. There's something about it, I suppose, the orderliness, the precision, the organic building up of solemn structures that just fills the kink in his life made by his tragic defection. She hoiks him to St. Anne's, Soho, to hear the oratorios. They chase the Bach choir hither and thither. She plays it herself, although she's not much of a performer. That's why she gets Furtwangler and sometimes the Stinzel quartette. When they are listening to Bach together, they meet on a plane of complete satisfaction. Of course, the war didn't do him any good. He used to hobble backwards and forwards to Whitehall doing some ridiculous

anti-aircraft intelligence stuff, and he used to look bitterly at his pals when he saw them prancing backwards and forwards, with the salt of the North Sea bitten into their faces. He was a good boy in those days, though. He left the bottle alone, and only groused and grumbled. Weren't we all doing that? . . . That's what I mean about people—married people especially—you can never tell whether they are happy or not. We all have to live our own lives in our own way. The breezy couple who go about singing 'La, too, te rum, tum, tumple, rum, tum, tootle, tootle, lay,' and who kiss in public, and say 'darling this' and 'darling that,' you generally find that one or both parties are carrying on a secret liaison with a cook or a chauffeur. Colin has just got to be like that, and the woman understands him. She doesn't want him different. While he is like that she has a more complete grip over him, because she knows that no other woman will understand or tolerate him. And they don't. Of course, they quarrel sometimes, and he goes off and makes no end of a beast of himself. But she knows she is secure. He will come whining back to her like a whipped puppy. And he will grope for her in the darkness, and she will hold his hand, and they will listen to the solemn chords of a Bach fugue, and will feel horribly melancholy, and tremendously moved, and somehow completely satisfied. That's just people,

they're like that. It's no good arguing about it. I must be going. I'm going to have a Turkish bath with Smithers."

The contemplation of Squidge in a Turkish bath talking to Smithers, who is enormously fat, held me for the moment, and then my mind reverted to Chasseloup.

Dash it! you couldn't help being interested in the beast. I had to acknowledge that, in spite of his rudeness and indifference to me, the man had somehow always attracted me. I suppose because I wanted to know him, his rudeness and indifference piqued me all the more. And his wife —well, there it was, I had only seen her in concert-halls and theatres, and riding about in taxis with him, but that peculiarly wistful face would have enslaved anyone. She was slight and fragile, with pale face and very red lips, and that curious gleaming blue-black hair that so often accompanies a pallid complexion. Her eyes were wonderful, large, reflective, dark, with terrific things going on in them all the time. At the same time I shouldn't describe them as altogether unhappy eyes. They reflected too much vital movement for that. The woman was living, and of how many of these hard-bitten society women can you say the same?

It happened that a few nights after my talk with Squidge, I met Chasseloup at the club. He was sitting in a corner of the smoking-room,

drinking whisky and being talked to by one of the pet club bores. He occasionally growled a monosyllabic reply. After a time the club bore retired and I was left alone with him. I sat back and smoked, but did not speak. We must have sat like that for nearly twenty minutes. There must have been something about this conspiracy of silence which appealed to Chasseloup. I was aware of him occasionally glancing at me, and at length he actually ventured to address a remark. He said :

"This club whisky gets worse every day."

I believe I must have blushed with pleasure as I hastened to acquiesce.

"Yes, it's awful stuff."

(Did you ever know a club where the members didn't all agree that the food and drink supplied was the worst in town ?)

After a few snappy sentences about the club whisky, Chasseloup even went so far as to generalize. He said :

"Fancy reaching the stage of Colonel Robbins, a man who led a brigade in South Africa, and now there's nothing left for him in life but to serve on wine committees."

I was startled by this sociable reflection, and before I could reply, he had capped it with :

"Even over that he's come to the end of his tether. His palate is worn out."

He rose abruptly and rang the bell and ordered

some more of the inferior stuff. This insignificant conversation seemed to form a bond between Chasseloup and myself. From that evening onwards his attitude towards me underwent a change. It was not that he talked much, but I was aware that I was one of the few members who didn't get on his nerves. It was extremely flattering.

"All right, my friend," I thought, "I'll find out all about you yet."

Nevertheless, there was a long interval of time between that conversation and the eventful Sunday evening, when I met him and his wife at the Minerva Musical Society's function at the Grafton Galleries.

Now it is not of the slightest importance, except as it affects the chronicle of the events I am about to describe, but I have to say that my own tastes with regard to music are catholic, cosmopolitan, and undistinguished. I like Chopin and Schumann, and most of the Old Masters. I like Bach when I'm in the mood. I even like Jazz music sometimes, and foxtrots, and barrel-organs, and Old Bill playing his mouth-organ. But I must confess that what is known as the modern British composer leaves me cold. Perhaps I'm not educated up to him. And the activities of the Minerva Musical Society are almost entirely concerned with the modern British composer. Crowds of very precious overfed and

underfed people meet together, and they sit on little gilt chairs and burble with delight about the productions of Mr. Cyrus P. Q. H. Robinson, or the tone poem of Ananathius K. Smith. I know nothing about it. They may be right. The only thing I have to record is that it bores me. The only reason I went to this particular evening was—and it is a weakness common to many weak-minded creatures like myself—that my wife took me. She is more eclectic about these matters than I am. She knows more, and so probably she is quite right in believing that Cyrus and Ananathius are geniuses. That isn't the point. The point is, I was frankly bored. And early in the evening, looking round the room, and confessing to myself that I was frankly bored, I suddenly happened to notice that the two people who had just come in and were sitting just behind us were Mr. and Mrs. Colin St. Clair Chasseloup. Immediately my boredom vanished. Here was a human problem of more interest than the scherzo movement of Mr. Cyrus P. Q. H. Robinson's F minor sonata. I looked round and fidgeted, and my wife said: "Hush!"

And then without any question I heard Chasseloup say in a rather rude, abrupt voice:

"I'm not going to listen to any more of this drivel."

And he got up and walked to the back of the room,

With two per cent. of his aplomb I got up and whispered :

"I don't care for this very much, dear. I'll just go and smoke a cigarette."

I strolled out and found Chasseloup in the corridor. He was looking thoroughly irritable. I went straight up to him and said :

"What about a drink, Chasseloup?"

His face cleared perceptibly. He gave me quite a friendly nod, and muttered :

"Yes."

I must now pay a tribute to that most sound of all social conventions—namely, that of evening dress. It will carry one through almost any difficulty. Chasseloup and I were both in evening dress.

We wandered out into Grafton Street just as we were, without hats or coats. He had gone barely twenty yards when I had to exclaim :

"Good God! It's Sunday night! Everything is shut. We are just five minutes too late. I'm awfully sorry, old boy."

It was interesting to watch the play of expression on Chasseloup's face. The jolt of irritation, the attempt to control a recognition of the jolt, and then the sudden ugly thrust of the chin. He merely said :

"Let's see what we can do."

But there was in that thrust all the perverse tendency of a man who meant to get a drink, not

because he particularly wanted it, but because he was annoyed at being thwarted.

We took two sharp turns to the left—or the right—and we came to a street, the name of which I mustn't tell you, otherwise the whole story becomes almost libellous. In any case, we were not five minutes' walk from the Grafton Galleries, and we were going down a world-renowned street, consecrated chiefly to very swell private clubs. Suddenly Chasseloup jerked out:

"That looks a good place. Let's try it."

From the exterior it was quite obvious what it was. It was a very select private club, probably an exclusive ornithologists' club, or a club consecrated to men who had won honours for discovering the secrets of subaqueous plant-life. I don't know. Chasseloup didn't know; but without the slightest hesitation we strolled casually into the smoke-room. The commissionaire glanced at us questioningly, but one look at Chasseloup convinced him that he was wrong in his doubts. With a proprietary air, Chasseloup flung himself into an easy chair on the right of the fire, and I occupied the left. There were only two old gentlemen in the room, and they were so absorbed in a conversation about goitres they didn't notice us. An ancient waiter appeared—a man who must have been there at least thirty years—and he came timidly forward. He was about to take orders in a mechanical

way, and then he looked at us, and a curious sense of misgiving seemed to creep over him, not as though he were suspecting us, but as though he were suspecting his own memory. Chasseloup, with his white waistcoat and gilt buttons, his braided trousers and commanding atmosphere, couldn't be anything but a most distinguished member.

The waiter fumbled clumsily with a tray, and murmured defensively :

"You gentlemen are stopping the night, I presume ?"

An expression of unctuous indignation settled on Chasseloup's features.

"Of course," he said.

The old waiter almost crawled on the carpet and took our order for two double whiskies. Thus, you may see what a domineering personality, backed up by evening dress, may accomplish. I could not possibly have done this by myself, but in the presence of Chasseloup I felt quite like an old member of this club of which I did not even know the name.

Chasseloup was not by any means a drunkard. But I discovered—at least, I have discovered later—that he considers three double whiskies his right and lawful due for an evening. They do not appear to have the slightest effect on him. We had two in this club—we were in there less than ten minutes—and then he said :

"We'll have one more somewhere else and then toddle back."

It appeared to me to have been a sufficient triumph to have broken the laws of the land so successfully and speedily, without challenging Fate further. Indeed, if we wanted one more drink we could easily have obtained it where we were. But it was quite patent that it was the very facility which was the obstacle in Chasseloup's case. It was all too dead easy. There was no fun in having a drink unless you had to fight for it. We had risen and walked to the door. Just as we reached the entrance hall, a man who looked like a butler came stealthily in from the street. He glanced anxiously at us, and then going up to Chasseloup, he whispered:

"Limpo?"

Now Chasseloup naturally had got a limp, and I expected to see this piece of impertinence drastically handled. Whatever was the fool getting at? But Chasseloup gave no sign. He just stared hard at the other, who quickly added:

"Her ladyship says will you come across immediately? I'll show you the way."

Chasseloup hesitated for a fraction of a second, then, squaring his shoulders, he said:

"Come on, then."

It was quite apparent that he had not the faintest idea what adventure he was committed to. Crossing the street, I whispered:

"What's it all about?"

And he whispered back:

"I don't know, but I guess we'll get our third drink."

We went into a palatial block of flats and entered a lift. We were whisked up five floors and ushered into a heavily carpeted hall. The butler left us and did not return for three or four minutes. When he did he seemed all on edge. He said nervously to Chasseloup:

"Er—would you mind your friend waiting outside, sir?"

Chasseloup spoke emphatically:

"No, tell her ladyship that where Limpo goes Blotto follows."

There was another interval, and then the butler returned and asked us both to follow him.

We went into a large smoking-room, sparsely furnished. The room was occupied by three men. They were all big men, and they were all standing. On the hearthrug stood one of the most sinister-looking individuals I have ever seen. He was very tall, with heavy shoulders and a fierce black moustache and wicked eyes. There was something about the way the men were standing I didn't like. It appeared to be all carefully planned. The big man, whose voice seemed surprisingly thin for his bulk, said banteringly:

"Oh, come in, Mr.—er—Limpo. Julius Lindt, perhaps I should say. It pains me to tell

you that her ladyship is not present, unavoidably detained—see?"

Chasseloup bowed formally, and said in an ice-cold voice:

"I regret to hear it."

"Um—um—yes. Yes, quite so. I can quite believe it. I presume you are a great reader of *The Times,* Mr.—er—Limpo, Lindt I should say."

"I always read *The Times,*" answered Chasseloup politely.

"Yes, and write for them, advertise, too, Mr.—er—Lindt. Nice, friendly, loving little paragraphs, eh?"

He held out a copy of *The Times,* the outside sheet showing. Round one paragraph someone had put a blue pencil line. The big man thrust it in Chasseloup's face and said:

"Just read that out, Mr.—er——"

There was a nasty dangerous tone in his voice. I didn't like it at all. I began to think lovingly of the Minerva Society, the little gilt chairs, and Cyrus P. Q. H. Robinson's F minor sonata. Chasseloup was perfectly calm. He never took his eyes off the other man's face. He said coldly:

"My friend, Blotto, will read it."

The paper was handed to me, and I read out from the agony column:

"Molly. Am yearning for you. Shall be at

the Club Sunday night. If the Dragon is away, send over for me. All my love. Limpo.''

I was too nervous to see the humour of the situation. Here was the outraged husband, and by great guile he had captured the wrong *tertium quid!* How could one explain? Chasseloup's regrettable limp appeared damning evidence. He had gone there, and deliberately put his head through the noose. The situation was appalling. The worst of it was, that under such circumstances men do not stop to think and reason. Passion and mob-law are old confederates. This fact was brought home during the ensuing seconds. Everything seemed to happen in a flash. I was conscious of the Dragon stretching out his hand towards a short, stocky riding-whip, which had been concealed by the fireplace; of the other two men stealthily closing in on Chasseloup. And then a fourth man—was it the butler?—gripped me by the throat from behind, and I was jerked towards the door. The idea was to get me out of the way whilst the other three men horsewhipped Chasseloup. I fell backwards into the hall, and the door slammed to. At least, it nearly did. It was slammed with terrific violence, but just in the nick of time a leg was thrust through. Now the force with which it was pushed would have broken any ordinary leg, but as it happened the leg that was thrust through was made of wood and steel framing.

The arms above were apparently engaged elsewhere. The sight of that upturned boot spurred me to action. I drove my elbows violently into the ribs of my attacker. I heard him groan, and I leapt forward to the door again. I think he must have been the butler. I never saw him again. When I forced my way back into the room, I think the moral effect of my presence was more valuable to our side than any physical exploit I was likely to offer. Three men against two are not overwhelming odds. The man just in front of the door, who was gripping Chasseloup by the waist, hesitated, and paid the penalty by getting a blow over his left eye. The other two men were closing in, when Chasseloup ducked and got free. It was then that I saw the man as he really was. His eyes were gleaming with exultation. He was thoroughly enjoying himself. With a sudden unexpected swerve he seized a vase and smashed the electric light globes. The room was in darkness.

Now for a mixed body of men to fight in the dark is a dangerous and difficult game. You do not know who is with you or against you. Oaths were exchanged rather than blows. And the Dragon called out:

"Where's Dawson? Where's that—butler?"

Then he gave a curse which showed that he was foolish to reveal his whereabouts. One fool struck a match, which served no better purpose

than to reveal the point of his jaw, a fact that was promptly taken advantage of. He went down and out. We were now two against two, and one of them had a black eye that would last many a week. The Dragon was blind with rage. He roared :

"Come out into the hall!"

And he stumbled out there and waved his arms challengingly. We all followed him. The man with the black eye had had enough, and I sat on the opposite side of the hall also a spectator. For it seemed to be suddenly mutually agreed that this was an affair between the Dragon and Chasseloup. They both wanted to fight. I could have yelled out that the whole thing was a mistake, a misunderstanding, that Chasseloup was not the man who had liaisons with the other man's wife ; but if I had done so I felt that Chasseloup would never forgive me. He had already taken his coat off, and so had the Dragon. And they fought. An affair of this nature between two heavy-weights seldom lasts long. It depends so much on who gets in the first good blow. And in this case the fight certainly didn't last three minutes. It was horrible. I don't know whether the Dragon was much of a boxer. He certainly seemed to have some knowledge of the game, but he never landed a blow. After a few exchanges he received a punch on the nose, and the blood ran down all over his dress shirt. Then

he hit wildly, and suddenly received three terrible blows in rapid succession; one on the chin, one on the jaw, and then a fearful thump over the heart, which laid him out. We were now in complete possession of the field, the man with the black eye being the only conscious enemy in the flat, and he had done with fighting for the day.

"Now, where's that butler?" said Chasseloup.

"Oh, come on, for God's sake!" I exclaimed, foreseeing more blood-letting. "Leave the butler alone. Let's get away."

"I'm not going till I get what I came for."

"What's that?"

"That drink."

The man with the black eye, who appeared to be some sort or hired ruffian, grinned in a sickly manner.

"All right, guv'nor," he said; "I can fix that for you."

He went into the dining-room and returned with a tantalus and some glasses.

Chasseloup poured himself out his double whisky, just the exact amount, and no more. Then he put on his coat and readjusted his hair in the mirror. His face was unscratched.

"There's something perfectly disgusting about you," I thought.

When he left the flat the Dragon was partly conscious, and he was mumbling something about the police and firearms and vengeance. We went

down in the lift. Just as we were going out through the entrance hall a typical young-man-about-town came up the steps. He was limping. Chasseloup raised his hat.

"Mr. Lindt, I presume?"

The young man started. Chasseloup smiled quite graciously.

"Her ladyship is expecting you in the smoke-room," he said.

"Oh! thank you, thank you, sir."

The dude blushed and hurried on.

"But, good Lord!" I exclaimed, when we were in the street. "It's a bit unfair. They'll half murder him."

"That's his affair," said Chasseloup. "Besides, it serves him right—to go fooling about with another man's wife."

To look back on it, it seems almost unbelievable, but from the moment when we left the Minerva Musical Society to the moment we returned marks the lapse of rather less than an hour. And when we returned nothing might have happened at all. There they all were, the same people, the same little gilt chairs. Everybody looked quite unconcerned, but nobody looked more unconcerned than Colin St. Clair Chasseloup, lolling indolently on a stuffed settee at the end of the room.

As it happened, they were just finishing some modern work, and then there was an interval.

Both our wives joined us and were introduced. Mrs. Chasseloup was charming. She said :

"You bad men ! where have you been ?"

Without waiting for a reply, she added excitedly :

"Colin, you'll be pleased. Paul Tingleton's ill, and he can't lead his quintette. And I've persuaded Mr. Oesler to end up with the Bach fugue you love so much."

Queer fish, people are. A few minutes later we were drinking lemonade and coffee and talking of such precious intimacies as the colour of a musical phrase, and only a quarter of an hour ago—— Then we were back in the concert hall, Chasseloup and his wife and my wife and I, and the great Mr. Oesler began to play Bach.

And then the queerest thing of all— Chasseloup ! Chasseloup, whose face I had seen but a few minutes before ablaze with anger and cruelty, suddenly mellowing, becoming gentle and wistful. And he leaned forward with his lips parted, and his wife sat beside him with an identical expression on her face. And then I saw his hand steal towards her lap, and she took it in both of hers and gripped it greedily. And they sat there, side by side, perfectly oblivious to their surroundings, perfectly happy, like two children listening to a fairy-tale.

BURNEY'S LAUGH

AFTER breakfast was a good time. Throughout the day there was no moment when his vitality rose to such heights as it did during the first puffs of that early cigar. He would stroll out then into the conservatory, and the bright colour of the azaleas would produce in him a strange excitement. His senses would seem sharpened, and he would move quickly between the flowers, and would discuss minor details of their culture with Benyon, the gardener. Then he would stroll through the great spaces of his reception-rooms with his head bent forward. The huge Ming pot on its ebony stand would seem to him companionable and splendid, the Majolica plaques which he had bought at Padua would glow serenely. He would go up and feast his eyes on the Chinese lacquer cabinet on its finely-wrought gilt base; and his lips would quiver with a tense enjoyment as he lingered by the little carved Japanese ivories in the recess. Above all, he liked to stand near the wall and gaze at the Vandyke above the fireplace. It looked well in the early morning light, dignified and impressive.

All these things were his. He had fought for them in the arena of the commercial world. He had bought them in the teeth of opposition. And they expressed *him,* his sense of taste, his courage, his power, his relentless tenacity, the qualities that had raised him above his fellows to the position he held. The contemplation of them produced in him a curious vibrant exhilaration. Especially was this so in the early morning when he rose from the breakfast-table, and lighted his first cigar.

The great hall, too, satisfied his quivering senses. The walnut panelling shone serenely, and brass and pewter bore evidence that the silent staff whom his housekeeper controlled had done their work efficiently. It was early—barely nine o'clock—but he knew that in the library Crevace and Dilgerson, his private secretaries, would be fidgeting with papers and expecting him. He would keep them waiting another ten minutes while he gratified this clamorous proprietary sense. He would linger in the drawing-room, with its long, grey panels and splendid damask hangings, and touch caressingly the little groups of statuary. The unpolished satinwood furniture appealed to some special æsthetic appetite. It was an idea of his own. It seemed at once graceful and distinguished.

He seemed to have so little time during the rest of the day to feel these things. And if he had the time, the satisfaction did not seem the

same, for this was the hour when he felt most virile.

In the library the exultation that he had derived from these æsthetic pleasures would gradually diminish. It is true that Dilgerson had prepared the rough draft of his amendment to the new Peasant Allotment Bill, and it was an amendment he was intensely interested in, for if it passed it might lead to the overthrow of Chattisworth, and that would be a very desirable thing, but nevertheless his interests would flag.

He had a fleeting vision of a great triumph in the House, and himself the central figure. He settled down to discuss the details with Dilgerson. Dilgerson was a very remarkable person. He had a genius for putting his finger on the vital spot of a bill, and he had moreover an unfathomable memory. But gradually the discussion of involved financial details with Dilgerson would tire him. He would get restless and say, "Yes, yes. All right, Dilgerson. Put it your own way."

He turned aside to the table where Crevace, coughing nervously, was preparing some sixty odd letters for him to sign. A charming young man, Crevace, with gentle manners and a great fund of concentration. He was the second son of Emma Countess of Waddes. He had not the great abilities of Dilgerson, but he was conscientious, untiring, and infinitely ornamental.

He discussed the letters and a few social matters with Crevace, while Dilgerson prepared the despatch-case for the Cabinet meeting at twelve o'clock.

At half-past eleven a maid entered and brought him a raw egg beaten up with a little neat brandy, in accordance with custom.

He told her that Hervieu, the chauffeur, need not come for him. He would walk over to Downing Street with Mr. Dilgerson. As a matter of fact, there were still one or two points upon which he was not quite clear about the rights of rural committees. Dilgerson had made a special study of these questions. It was a great temptation to rely more and more on Dilgerson.

He enjoyed a Cabinet meeting. He felt more at home there than in the House. He liked the mixture of formality and urbanity with which the most important affairs were discussed. He liked to sit there and watch the faces of his fellow-ministers. They were clever, hard-headed men, men who like himself had climbed, and climbed, and climbed. They shared in common certain broad political principles, but he did not know what was at the back of any one of their minds. It amused him to listen to Brodray elaborating his theories about the Peasant Allotment Bill, and enunciating commendable altruistic principles. He knew Brodray well. He was a good fellow, but he did not really believe what he was saying.

He had another axe to grind, and he was using the Peasant Allotment Bill as a medium. The divagations of "procedure" were absorbing. It was on the broad back of "procedure" that the interests of all were struggling to find a place. It was the old parliamentary hand who stood the best chance of finding a corner for his wares. The man who knew the ropes. He, too, had certain ambitions. . . .

It seemed strange to look back on. He had been in political affairs longer than he dare contemplate. Two distinct decades. He had seen much happen. He had seen youth and ambition ground to powder in the parliamentary machine. He had seen careers cut short by death or violent social scandal. Some men were very foolish, foolish and lacking in—moral fibre, that must be it. Moral fibre ! the strength not to overstep the bounds, to keep passion and prejudice in restraint, like hounds upon a leash, until their veins become dried and atrophied, and they lack the desire to race before the wind. . . .

He had done that. And now he sat there in the sombre room among the rustling papers, and the greatest Minister of them all was speaking to him, asking his opinion, and listening attentively to his answers. He forced himself to a tense concentration on the issue. He spoke quietly but well. He remembered all the points that the excellent Dilgerson had coached him in. He was

conscious of the room listening to him attentively. He knew they held the opinion that he was—safe, that he would do the best thing in the interest of the Party.

O'Bayne spoke after that, floridly, with wild dashes of Celtic fun, and they listened to him, and were amused but not impressed. O'Bayne, too, had an axe to grind, but he showed his hand too consciously. He did not know the ropes.

As the meeting broke up, Brodray came up to him and said :

"Oh, by the way, you know I'm dining with you to-night. May I bring my young nephew with me? He's a sub, in town for a few days' leave."

Of course he smiled and said it would be delightful. What else could he say?

As a matter of fact he would rather not have had the young sub. He had arranged a small bachelors' dinner—just eight of them—and he flattered himself he had arranged it rather skilfully. There was to be Brodray, and Nielson, the director of the biggest agricultural instrument works in the country, Lanyon the K.C., Lord Bowel of the Board of Trade, Tippins, a big landowner from the North, Sir Andrew Griggs, the greatest living authority on the Land Laws (he had also written a book on "artificial manures"), and Sir Gregory Caste, director of the Museum of Applied Arts.

The latter, he felt, would be perhaps a little out of it with the rest, but he would help to emphasize his own aspect of social life, its irreproachable taste and patronage of the arts. It would be a very eclectic dinner-party, and one in which the fusion of the agricultural interests might tend to produce certain opinions and information of use in conducting the Peasant Allotment Bill, and a young red-faced sub dumped into the middle of it would be neither appropriate nor desirable. There was, however, nothing to be done. He and Brodray had always been great friends—that is to say, they had always worked hand in hand.

He rested in the afternoon, for as the years advanced he found this more and more essential. There were the strictest instructions left that under no circumstances was he to be disturbed till half-past four. In the meanwhile the egregious Dilgerson would cope with his affairs.

At half-past four he rose and bathed his face, and after drinking one cup of tea he rejoined his secretaries in the library. In his absence many matters had developed. There was a further accumulation of correspondence, and a neat typewritten list of telephone messages and applications for appointments. But there was no flurry about Dilgerson; everything was in order, and the papers arranged with methodical precision.

He lighted his second cigar of the day and sat down. The graceful head of Crevace was

inclined over the papers, and the suave voice of Dilgerson was saying :

"I see, sir, that Chattisworth has been speaking up in Gaysfield. Our agent has written, he thinks it might be advisable for you to go up North and explain our attitude towards the Bill to your constituents. They must not be—er—neglected for long in these restless times."

Yes, there was something satisfying in this. The sense of power, or rather the sense of being within the power focus, the person who understood, who knew what power meant, and yet was great enough to live outside it. Strange why to-day he should be so introspective, why things should appear so abstract ! He had a curious feeling as though everything was slipping away, or as though he were seeing himself and his setting from a distance.

He gazed at Dilgerson with his square chin, and his neat moustache, deftly stowing papers into a file whilst he spoke. He momentarily envied Dilgerson with his singular grip on life. He was so intense, so sure. . . .

"Yes . . . yes," he said after a time, "we'd better go up there, Dilgerson. As you say, they get restless. You might draft me a rough summary of Chattisworth's points. Let me know what you would suggest—precedents, historical parallels and so on. It is true ; they so soon get restless."

A feeling of apathy came to him after a time, and he left his secretaries and strolled out into the Mall. A fine rain was drifting from the south, and the tops of the winter trees seemed like a band of gauze veiling the buildings of Whitehall. He went into St. James's Park and watched the pale lights from the Government Buildings. Some soldiers passed him, and a policeman touched his hat.

Usually these things moved him with a strange delight. They were the instruments of power, the symbols of the world he believed in. But to-night the vision of them only filled him with an unaccountable melancholy.

He suddenly remembered a day when he had strolled here with his wife twenty-five years ago. . . .

He passed his hand across his brow and tried to brush back a certain memory. But it would not be denied. It was a grey day like this. She had made some remark, something sentimental and—entirely meretricious. He remembered vividly that he had chided her at the time. One must not think like that ; one must restrain and control these emotional impulses. They are retrograde, destroying. He had succeeded, risen to the position he held, because—he had always been master of himself.

After his wife's death it had been easier to do this. His two daughters had married well, one

to the Bishop of St. Lubin, and the other to Viscount Chesslebeach, a venerable but well-informed gentleman, who had been loyal to the Party. His son was now in India, holding a position of considerable responsibility. He was free, free to live and struggle for his great ambitions. He was fortunate in that respect; in fact, he had always been fortunate.

He made his way back across the muddy pathway of the Mall, imbued with a sudden uncontrollable desire for light and warmth.

Gales met him in the hall and relieved him of his coat. There was an undeniable sense of comfort and security about Gales. He glanced furtively at the ponderous figure of his head "man," who had been with him now longer than he could remember. He muttered something about the inclemency of the weather, and it soothed him to note the ingratiating acquiescence of the servant, as though by addressing him he had conferred a great benefit upon him. He heard the heavy breathing of Gales as he bustled away with his hat and coat, and then he warmed his hands by the fire, and strolled upstairs to dress.

As he entered his bedroom an indefinable feeling of dreariness came over him again. It was very silent there, and the well-modulated lights above the dressing-table revealed his gleaming silver brushes and the solid properties of the mahogany bed. He looked at the fire and lighted a cigar-

ette, a very unusual habit for him. Then he went into his dressing-room and noted his clothes all neatly laid out for him, and the brass can of hot-water wrapped in the folds of a rough towel. The door half-open revealed the silver rails and taps in the bathroom, and a very low hum of sound suggested a distant power station or the well-oiled machinery of a lift. It was all wonderfully ordered, wonderfully co-ordinated.

He strolled from one room to the other on the thick pile carpet, trying to thrust back the waves of dejection that threatened to envelop him.

At last he threw his cigarette away, and, disrobing himself, he washed and dressed.

He felt better then, a little more alert and interested. He turned down the light and went downstairs. He felt suddenly curiously nervous and apprehensive about the dinner-party. He went into the dining-room and found Gales instructing a new butler in the subtleties of his profession. The table was laid for nine, and indeed looked worthy of Gales and of himself. There was a certain austerity and distinction about the three bowls of red tulips that were placed at intervals along it, and the old silver and the Nuremberg glasses, and the cunning arrangements of concealed lights emphasized his own sure taste and discrimination. Nevertheless, he felt nervous. He fussed about the table, and took the champagne-bottles from their ice beds

to satisfy himself that Gales had brought up the right year. He fidgeted with one of the type-written menu-cards, and told Gales that on a previous occasion Fouchet had overdone the Lucca oil in the Hollandaise. He must speak to him. He was not sure that Fouchet was not going off. His eyesight was failing, or he was becoming careless. The straw potatoes served with the pheasant had been cut too thick, and his savouries were apt to be too dry. Gales listened to these criticisms with a lugubrious sympathy, and, bowing, he left the room to convey them to the *chef*.

After that he retired to the small Japanese room on the ground floor. When he had a bachelor party he preferred to receive his guests there. There was something about the black walls, and the grotesquely carved fireplace, and the heavily timbered ceiling, also carved and painted dark red, that appealed to his sense of appropriateness in a men's dinner-party. It was essentially a man's room, a little foreboding and bizarre. It symbolized also his appreciation of a race who were above all things clever ; clever and patient, industrious, æsthetic, with some quality that excited the mystic tendencies of the cultivated Westerner.

He had not long to wait before two of his guests arrived—Sir Gregory Caste and Lanyon the K.C. They had met in the cloak-room, and,

having previously made each other's acquaintance at an hotel at Baden-Baden, were discussing the medical values of rival Bavarian springs. It was a subject on which he himself was no mean authority. The conversation had not progressed far before Lord Bowel was shown in. He was a very big man with a heavy dome of a head, large pathetic eyes and a thick grey beard. He shook hands solemnly without any gleam of welcome, and immediately gave an account of an incurable disease from which his sister was suffering.

Tippins then arrived, a square-headed North-countryman, who did not speak all the evening except in self-defence, and he was followed by Sir Andrew Griggs and Nielson. Sir Andrew was well into the eighties, and Nielson was a thin, keen-faced man with very thick glasses. There was a considerable interval before Brodray arrived with his nephew. They were at least ten minutes late, and Brodray was very profuse with apologies.

It was curious that the young man was almost precisely as he had pictured him. He was just a red-faced boy in khaki. He fancied that Brodray introduced him as "Lieutenant Burney," but he was not sure. It was in any case some such name, something ordinary and insignificant.

They then all adjourned to the dining-room without breaking the general level of their conversation, and sat down.

On his right he had Lord Bowel, and on his

left Sir Andrew Griggs. Brodray faced him with Sir Gregory Caste on his right and his nephew on the left. Lanyon sat next to the lieutenant, and Nielson and Tuppins occupied the intervening spaces. He had thought this arrangement out with considerable care.

It was not until the sherry and caviare had fulfilled their destiny that Lord Bowel managed to complete the full description of his sister's disease. He spoke very slowly and laboriously, and moved his beard with a curious rotary movement as he masticated his food.

Sir Andrew Griggs then managed to break into the conversation with a dissertation on the horrors of being ill in a foreign hotel. He had once been suddenly seized with a serious internal trouble, and had had to undergo an operation in an hotel in Zermatt. It was very trying, and the hotel people were very unreasonable.

Brodray sang the praises of a new American osteopathist during the removal of the soup plates, and the salmon found the director of the National Museum of Applied Arts dilating upon the virtues of grape-fruit as a breakfast food.

The host was in no hurry. He knew that the course of events would be bound to draw the conversation into channels connected with matters that were of moment to the construction of the Peasant Allotment Bill.

What more natural than that the virtues of

grape-fruit should lead to the virtues of fresh air and exercise, and then obviously to horse-flesh. At the first glass of champagne the company were already in the country. Horses and dogs! Ah! how difficult to eliminate them from the conversation of a party of representative Englishmen!

Lord Bowel was the first to express his views upon the Bill. The conversation led to it quite naturally at the arrival of the pheasant. They were better cooked to-night, and the potatoes were thinner, more refined.

He watched the curious movement of Lord Bowel's beard as he bit the pheasant, and said in his sepulchral voice:

"The Groynes amendment will in my opinion inflict a grave injustice on the agricultural classes. You may remember that in Gangway's Rural Housings Bill in eighteen ninety-five, Lord Pennefy, who was then on the Treasury Bench, said . . ."

The ball had started. He had a curious feeling that he wished Dilgerson were there. Dilgerson had such a remarkable memory. He particularly wanted to get Lanyon's views. Lanyon had a great reputation among the people who knew. Unfortunately he was not a good Party man. They said of him that he had a mind like a double-edged sword. He was keen, analytical, and recondite; and he did not mind whom he struck. The lawyer was listening to Lord Bowel

intently. His skin was dry and cracked into a thousand little crevices, his cheek-bones stood out, and his cold, abstract eyes were gazing through his rimless pince-nez at his empty glass. For he did not drink.

Lord Bowel dwelt at great length on the Bill's unfortunate attitude towards the agricultural labourer, and at even greater length on the probable result of that attitude upon the agricultural labourer at the polls. When he mentioned the Party he sank his voice to a lower key, and spoke almost humanly.

The pheasants had disappeared, and little quails in aspic had quivered tremulously in the centre of large plates surrounded by a vegetable salad, the secret of which he himself had discovered when living in Vienna, before Lanyon entered the arena with a cryptic utterance, quoting from an Act of James II. He spoke harshly and incisively, like a judge arraigning a criminal. It was very interesting, for the host became aware that as Lanyon proceeded he was not speaking from conviction. He had heard that Lanyon had ambitions of a certain legal position. The Bill would not affect it one way or the other, but his reputation as a dialectician must be established beyond question. He had his game to play, too.

Nielson broke in and seemed to the host to agree with Lord Bowel in an almost extravagant

manner. He, too, spoke feelingly when the Party was the theme. It was said that Lord Bowel was the power behind the Chief. He certainly exerted a great influence in the selection of office-holders. Men whose political reputation was not made invariably agreed with Lord Bowel, in any case before his face.

The game pursued its normal course, the even tenor of the men's voices sounded one long drone of abstract passionless sound. Under the influence of the good wine, and the solemn procession of cunningly arranged foods, they sank into a detached unity of expression. They looked at each other tolerantly, listening for signs and omens, and measuring the value of each other's remarks. There was no enthusiasm, no passion, nothing to belie the suave and cultivated accents of their voices. They seemed perhaps unreal to each other, merely a segregation of ideas meeting in a mirage, without prejudice, or bias, or any great desire for personal expression.

It was as the savoury was being removed that young Burney laughed. The host did not catch what it was that made him laugh, neither did he ever know. It was probably some wildly humorous remark of Tippins. But it came crashing through the room like the reel of pipes in a desert. It was not a boisterously loud laugh, but it was loud enough to rise above the general din.

It was the quality of it that seemed to rend the air like an electric thrill. It was clear, mellow, vibrant, and amazingly free. It rang out with an unrestrained vibrato of enjoyment. It hung in the air and satisfied its purpose; it seemed to lash the walls of the room and hurl its message defiantly at the ceiling. It could not be subdued, and it could never be forgotten. It was an amazing laugh. It was like the wind on the moors, or the crash of great high waves breaking on a rock, something that had been imprisoned and suddenly breaks free and rides serenely to its end. . . .

"And the saintly Cybeline"—

It was curious. Why, immediately he heard the young man's laugh, did this line occur to him? Gales was standing by the sideboard looking flustered and perturbed. People did not laugh in the presence of Gales. He had a faculty of discouraging any flippant digressions from the dignity of politics or dinner. Lanyon was looking in the young man's direction, his keen eyes surveying the wine-glasses set there.

Old Sir Andrew looked at him also and smiled dimly; but, surprisingly enough, the others hardly seemed to have noticed the laugh.

Lord Bowel was saying:

"If, therefore, we are prepared to accept this

crisis which the Opposition—with a singular lack of insight, in my opinion—seem disposed to precipitate upon the country, we shall be—er—lacking in loyalty not only to the—er—Constitution, but to ourselves, and I said to the Chief on Wednesday . . .''

'And the saintly Cybeline"—

What on earth did it mean? What was Lord Bowel talking about? Why did the young man's laugh still seem to be ringing round the room? He looked at him, the boy was talking animatedly to Brodray and grinning; he thought he caught something about "we didn't sleep under cover for a fortnight." He had not been drinking—certainly not to excess. No one had had sherry except the silent Tippins. He might have had three glasses of champagne. It certainly didn't account for the laugh; besides, it was not that sort of laugh.

"There was something, something, something,
And the something will entwine,
And the something, something, something
With the saintly Cybeline."

A shadowy vision glimmered past the finger-bowl in front of him. He remembered now—it was in Frodsee's room at Magdalen. There was a tall chap, with curly dark hair, sitting on

Frodsee's table, swinging his legs. He was in "shorts," and his bare knees and stockings were splashed with mud. Frodsee himself was standing by the window, declaiming his ridiculous jingle. And there was a third boy there who was laughing uncontrollably.

"With the saintly Cybeline."

He wished he could remember the rest of the words. The sun was streaming through the window, and the young willows were whispering above the river. The jingle finished and they all laughed, and one laugh rang out above the rest. Strange that it should all come rushing back to him at that moment—the free ring of his own laughter across the years! He had something then, he couldn't think what it was, something that he had since lost.

"Even if in the end we have to sacrifice some of these minor principles, I am inclined to think, sir, that the broader issues will be better served. . . . The interests of the Party are interdependent . . ."

Nielson was speaking, nervously twisting the cigar in his mouth.

He made a desperate plunge to find his place in the flow of this desultory discussion. He mumbled some inchoate remark upon the Land Laws. It was not in any way germane to what

had just been said, and he knew it, only he wanted them to draw him back among them, to protect him from the flood of perverse memories that strove to increase his melancholy.

But the memory of that laugh unnerved him. He could not concentrate. He longed once more for Dilgerson, or for some power that would give him a grip upon his concrete existence. He rose from the table and led his guests back into the Japanese room. He lighted a cigar, and, contrary to his custom, he indulged in a liqueur. His guests formed themselves into little groups, and he hovered between them, afraid to remain with either long, in case they should discover his horror, that in that hour—all through a boy's laugh—he had lost the power to concentrate.

Perhaps something in his manner conveyed itself to his guests, for they broke up early. First old Griggs, then Nielson, then Brodray, and the boy. He shook the boy's hand, but made no comment.

Lanyon took his departure alone, and Tippins followed. Lord Bowel seemed the only one disposed to remain. He sank back in an easy chair and talked interminably, unconscious of any psychologic change in the atmosphere of the room. He found a patient listener in Gregory Caste, to whom the discussions of a Government official were as balm.

The host moved restlessly, blinking at his two remaining guests. Sometimes he would sit furtively on the edge of a chair and listen, and nod his head, and say, "Yes . . . yes, I quite agree. Yes, that is so."

Then he would rise, and walk to the fireplace and move some object an inch or two from the position in which it was placed, and then move it back again. He drank a glass of lemon-water, a row of which were placed on a silver tray by the wall, and smoked another cigarette. Then the instinct of common courtesy prompted him once more to join his two remaining guests. He looked closely at Lord Bowel's heavy cheeks, and a curious feeling of disgust came over him. The voice of the Board of Trade official boomed on luxuriously about the arts of Eastern people, about ceramics, about the diseases of bees, the iniquity of licensing restrictions, the influence of Chaldean teaching on modern theology, on the best hotel in Paris, on the vacillating character of the principal leaders of the Opposition. There seemed no end to the variety of theme, and no break in the dull monotony of voice.

It must have been well after midnight that Lord Bowel suddenly sighed heavily and rose. He took his host's hand and said gloomily :

"It has been a most delightful evening."

He watched the two men pass out into the

hall, and saw Gales come ponderously forward and help them with their coats. Then he drew back and looked into the fire. He pressed his hand to his brow. He had not a headache, but he felt peculiarly exhausted, as though he had been through some great strain. In the fire he saw again the nodding heads of willows and the young clouds scudding before the wind. . . . He started. He could not understand ; he could have sworn that at that moment he again heard someone laugh. He looked round to convince himself that he was alone in the room. He shivered and stood up. He was not well. He was getting old. A time comes to all men—— Anyway, he had not been a failure. He had succeeded, in fact, beyond his wildest dreams. His name was known to everyone in England. His features even graced the pages of the satiric journals. He was the "safe" man of the Party. One paper had nicknamed him "Trumps," the safest card in the pack. It was something to have achieved this, even if—he had sacrificed things, impulses, convictions, passions, the fierce joy of expressing his primitive self. Perhaps in the process he had lost something.

Ah, God ! He wished the young man had not laughed.

There was a gentle tap on the door, and Gales came in.

"Oh, I beg your pardon, sir!" he murmured softly.

"It's all right. I'm going to bed."

He rose weakly from the chair and went upstairs. Once more in the bedroom, the silence tormented him. The furniture seemed no longer his own, no longer an expression of himself, but a cold, frigid statement of dead conformity. He touched the bed, and then walked up and down. What could he do? He had no power to combat the strange terrors of remorse that flooded him. He sat there silently waiting for the mood to pass. He knew that if he struggled it *would* pass. He would be himself again. It was all so foolish, so unworthy of him. He kept saying that to himself, but underneath it all something else seemed stirring, something that went to the roots of his being and shook him violently.

He waited there a long time, till the house seemed given over to the embraces of the night, then he stealthily crept downstairs again. It was all in darkness. He turned on the light in the hall and dining-room. He wandered to his accustomed chair at the dining-table and huddled into it. He struggled to piece together the memories of days of freedom and splendour, when he had sacrificed nothing, when life was an open book.

He visualized little incidents of his childhood

and schooldays, but they seemed trivial and without significance or humour.

Ah, God ! if he could laugh !

He started suddenly at the sound of someone moving in the hall. He knew instinctively it would be Gales. He jumped up. He did not want his loyal retainer to think him a fool. It would be the most terrible thing of all to appear ridiculous to Gales. He walked round the room nervously peering at the floor.

Gales blinked at him. He was in a dressing-gown, and he mumbled :

" I beg your pardon, sir ?"

He glanced at Gales but said nothing. He continued searching the floor. Gales advanced into the room and coughed, and looked at him curiously. He had never known Gales look at him before in quite that way. He felt suddenly angry with the servant and wanted to get rid of him, but at the same time he was self-conscious and afraid. He was aware of the level tones of Gales's voice murmuring :

" Excuse me, sir, may I help you ? Have you lost anything ? Can I——"

The horror came home to him with increased violence as he glanced at the puffy cheeks of the butler. He felt that he could not endure him for another moment. He almost ran to the door, calling out in a harsh voice as he did so :

"Yes . . . yes. I've lost something."

He brushed past the butler, his cheeks hot and dry, and his eyes blazing with an unforgiving anger. He did not turn again, but hurried away, like an animal that is ashamed to be seen, and ran whimpering upstairs to his bedroom.

THE BABY GRAND

WHEN the Gabril family first came to live in Camden Town, Gabril was not their name. They were reputed to have come from Silesia, and to have arrived with a name that was quite beyond the capabilities of the neighbourhood to pronounce. Some genius invented the name of Gabril for them, and it was probably a contraction of a more grandiose nomenclature. They were of Jewish stock, but had long ceased to practise or conform to any religious creed. It may almost be said that they had ceased to conform to any creed at all. They were a thoroughly unpleasant family. Solomon Gabril, the father, was a piano-tuner. He had been married twice, and both his wives had died. By his first wife he had two sons and two daughters—Paul, Mischa, Selma, and Katie. By his second wife, one daughter, Lena.

At the time when this story commences, Paul and Mischa were in the early twenties, Selma was eighteen, Katie seventeen, and Lena thirteen. They lived in three rooms and a scullery in a dingy house in Benthal Street. Solomon was a thoroughly competent piano-tuner, otherwise it

is quite certain that the eminent firm of piano manufacturers in Kentish Town would not have tolerated him. He was dirty, untidy, wheezy, and vacillating. He indulged in drinking bouts, when nothing would be seen of him for days. When sober his manner was ingratiating, and somewhat facetious. He had a perpetual sneering grin. He was, however, not entirely without feeling, and not entirely a fool. He was not capable of studied cruelty. He wished well towards his family, and would give them the best of everything, if it hadn't been that there was barely enough for his own indulgences, and self came first. He paid the rent, allowed Selma, the eldest girl, a sufficient sum weekly to buy the bare necessities of life for the rest, and he never struck the children. It cannot be said that either of his sons had so good a character. Paul was frankly what is known as "a bad egg." He had been to prison twice for petty thefts. He never kept a situation for more than a few weeks. He was idle, depraved, and quarrelsome. Mischa was less objectionable than his brother. He was quieter, had never been convicted in crime, but was phlegmatic, morose, and stupid. He worked in a candle factory.

Selma was a narrow strip of a girl, with eyes too close together. She surreptitiously spent money meant for the food of the family on trinkets. She was supposed to manage the household, and

to do the cooking and cleaning, and, during such time as she could spare from the local picture-house, she did make some sort of effort in this direction. She was furtive and selfish.

Katie, who did various odd jobs in teashops and private houses, was more like her brother Mischa. She was of the flaccid kind, and sighed her way through the dreary monotony of her days.

The whole family lived in a continuous state of hunger and irritation, with the exception of Mr. Gabril, who was not particularly interested in eating, but who always managed to get a good dinner every day at a coffee-shop, and who drank sufficient beer both to feed himself and to keep him in a static condition of oleaginous indifference to the troubles of others.

Being, as it were, engrafted on to this deplorable family tree, one may readily imagine that the conditions and prospects of the youngest child, Lena, were anything but roseate. She was quite obviously different from the rest. Her mother had been a singer, who died at Lena's birth. The child had a broad plump face, and dark-brown reflective eyes. She was curiously reserved, and she endured the insults and bullying of her sisters, and the cuffs of her elder brother, with almost uncanny fortitude, as though when all was said and done she was stronger than they; as though she had enduring treasures to defend.

She was sent to the local church school, more with the idea of getting her out of the way, and keeping her out of mischief, than with benefiting her with the liberal education obtainable at that institution. Having bundled her off to school, the family's interest in her education and progress vanished. But it was instilled into her in early life that she was the only one who contributed nothing to the general upkeep of the house, and that the sooner she grew up and went out and earned her living the better it would be for her. She slept in one bedroom with the two stepsisters, the three men occupied the other, whilst the third room was dubbed facetiously "the parlour" by Mr. Gabril. It was the room where the whole family congregated, fed, quarrelled, and indulged in whatever recreations were available. It was furnished with a dilapidated sofa, four cane chairs, two packing-cases used as chairs, a deal table, a fitted cupboard, an oleograph of King Edward as an admiral, and several coloured plates taken from Christmas numbers. It had a smell of its own, in which fish, cabbage, smoke, drying clothes, and unwashed humanity mingled in degrees varying with the time of day, and the state of the weather.

Lena was not allowed to sit on the sofa, which was usually occupied by the males, or in their absence the other two girls. She usually sat on a packing-case by the window, and there she

would pore over her school books, trying to learn her lessons, amidst the general din, bickering, and disorder.

The family took no interest in her activities, other than those which affected themselves. On her part she formed outside friendships, and developed ambitions which she never imparted to the rest.

And then one day a strange thing happened.

It was evening, and the family had just finished supper. The boys had gone out. Mr. Gabril was sprawling on the sofa, smoking, and reading the evening paper. Selma was washing up in the scullery, Katie was making herself a blouse, and Lena was sitting on her packing-case, reading, when there came a knock at the door. Mr. Gabril said: "Come in!" and there entered a young, rather good-looking clergyman.

The surprise and consternation of the family was immense. The visit of a policeman could not have created a greater shock. Mr. Gabril started as though he expected to be accused of some dreadful vice. Katie dropped her sewing. Selma, catching sight of the visitor through the open door, swiftly wiped her hands on a dry rag, and prepared to re-enter the room. Lena alone seemed unmoved. The stranger said, cheerily:

"Mr. Gabril?"

"That's my name," said Mr. Gabril, suspiciously.

"Good-evening, Mr. Gabril. My name is Winscombe, of the—er—church schools. I wanted to have a word with you about your daughter. Ah! good-evening, Lena!"

The mystery deepened. He nodded familiarly to Lena, who smiled a recognition. Now, what was this all about? The family had no particular use for clergymen, a cold, repressive, prying lot. At the same time, he was certainly a pleasant, gentlemanly fellow. There might be something to be got out of him. The grin returned to Mr. Gabril's face.

"Oh!" he said. "I didn't know. What's it about?"

Selma, who had entered the room, and liked the appearance of the young man, *qua* young man, had a brain-wave. She said:

"Won't you sit down, sir?"

He bowed, and replied:

"Thank you, thank you. Your other two daughters, I presume. Good-evening! Good-evening!"

He sat down and balanced his hat on his knee. Then he began speaking eagerly.

"Do you know, Mr. Gabril, we think your daughter has talent, decided talent. I expect you know she was introduced to my sister by Miss Watson at the school, who suspected her of being musical. My sister has been giving her lessons for the last year, and she is very im-

pressed, very impressed indeed. My sister is not a great musician herself, and she is of opinion that Lena should go to someone more advanced."

"Well, the deuce! The nasty, furtive little cat! Why has she said nothing about this?" reflected Mr. Gabril. Outwardly, he continued to grin, and he spluttered out:

"Eh? Oh yes! Well, well!"

His mind became active. Plays the piano, eh? Well, what did the fellow want? Did he think that he, Solomon Gabril, was going to spend money on piano lessons? Was he such a fool as that? On the other hand, if she could play, perhaps there was money in it. Perhaps she could go on and play at the pictures. He'd heard of girls getting two or three pounds a week at the game. Well? The young fellow continued to talk.

"It has all fallen out rather fortunately, I hope you'll agree. A friend of ours, a comparatively wealthy man, who is also a musical patron, introduced her to Soltz, the well-known professor. Lena played to him yesterday, and he too was impressed by her extreme promise. My friend is willing to pay for a course of lessons for her with Herr Soltz. I presume you would have no objection?"

Something for nothing was entirely in keeping with Mr. Gabril's sense of social morality. But what about this? In what way did *he* benefit?

It wanted thinking over. These people evidently had money. It would be much better if they gave the money to him, and *he* supervised the girl's musical education. On the other hand, if they taught her to play properly—well, there was money in that. Perhaps it would be better to agree in the meantime. He said:

"Oh, really? Very nice, I'm sure—very nice."

The clergyman continued:

"She will, of course, be leaving school shortly, and then, if she is allowed to devote her whole time to music, we think she may go far—very far indeed."

"Playing for the pictures?" said Mr. Gabril, tentatively.

"Oh, farther than that, I trust."

"Playing at concerts, and so on?"

"Why, yes, and giving her own recitals, and being engaged by orchestral societies, becoming a great artiste, in fact."

Mr. Gabril's eyes narrowed. He was a piano-tuner. He knew something about the profession. There were people like Paderewski and Pachmann making a lot of money. It had not occurred to him to associate his scrubby little daughter with the dazzling side of a musical career. He had not known till that moment that she knew a note of music. This was an historical day in the history of the Gabril family. But it had its reaction.

When the clergyman had gone, Selma flared up. She was jealous, and furious. She went up to Lena and said :

"You little sneak !" and she slapped her face. And then Mr. Gabril saw red. He grabbed Selma, and screamed at her :

"You fool ! Leave her alone, or I'll shake the life out of you !"

Selma cried, and Lena cried, and Katie joined in the general uproar, and eventually said she felt sick and was going to bed. Their individual emotions were at cross purposes. Selma couldn't see that her father was primarily concerned with the commercial potentialities of the situation. She accused him of taking Lena's side against her, who did all the work. *She* was only drudge. *She* wasn't given piano lessons. Rich people didn't come chasing after *her*. A nice thing it was. She supposed Lena would be having dancing lessons next, and be going to Buckingham Palace to be presented at Court. Selma was very hysterical, her mind a little confused by a film she had seen that afternoon, called "The Heir to Millions." It was a thoroughly unpleasant evening, and was not improved by the late advent of the two brothers, both rather drunk. They were too drunk to be impressed by the news about the clergyman's visit. Paul laughed boisterously.

"A parson, eh?" he kept on repeating. "Fancy a parson coming 'ere !" He seemed

to think it was quite the funniest thing that had ever happened.

For several weeks Lena was subjected to a running fire of jeering comments, vindictive on the part of her stepsisters, ironic and inane on the part of the brothers. It was only Mr. Gabril himself who displayed any kind of tolerance. He cannot be said to have shown any great sympathy, but he licked his lips and leered, and bade the others shut up. He told romantic stories of vast fortunes made out of playing the piano. None of the others believed him. It was a dream so outside their normal conception of life as lived in Camden Town, that they could not visualize it. It was possible that romantic figures in other settings did such things, but scrubby little Lena, with whose superfluous person they had been herded day and night all her wretched life—nonsense!

The only note of reality was struck three weeks after the clergyman's visit, for one day a piano arrived. It was what is known as a baby grand, and was put in "the parlour." Now this was a concrete and astonishing occurrence. A piano costs money. Amidst the packing-cases and flimsy furniture of the Gabrils' parlour it struck a flamboyant, an alarming note. If it had been an ordinary upright piano it would not have seemed out of place, but a grand! Even Paul

was slightly awed, and Selma disagreeably impressed. It seemed to take up all the room, to be insolently assertive. Its contempt for the flimsy furniture oozed from its shining black sides. It was like a large Persian cat of ancient pedigree finding itself in a room full of scraggy, ill-born kittens.

Mr. Gabril chuckled with satisfaction. He ran his fingers over the keys, playing the few florid harmonies he was accustomed to indulge in on his tuning rounds. It was a magnificent piano. The angle of the family's attitude towards Lena shifted a little. What if there were something in it after all? Each one naturally thought of his or her own interests. "Suppose she does make money, where do I come in?"

They stood round the piano in a group and made her play. They seemed to expect some astounding miracle to happen right away. They wanted her to give some definite proof that gold would quickly flow as a result of her exertions. They were disappointed. She certainly seemed to play all right. But she played very dull pieces. There was nothing about the performance to dazzle or surprise.

Nevertheless, they granted her a certain amount of freedom. She was allowed to practise for several weeks unmolested, until the novelty of the situation began to wear off. They got tired of her scales, arpeggios, and repetitions. Besides,

nothing was being said about paying her large sums for playing in public. Paul wouldn't let her play at all when he was in the house. Mischa brought home a young man friend, who banged out jazz tunes for two evenings running. Selma began to find the piano useful for piling up plates, and pans, and pots. In three months' time the piano had ceased to be an object of awe. Respect for it vanished. It became part and parcel of the room. Its lid was scratched and marked. It was piled up with papers and plates and odd rubbish. Lena only practised when the others were out, and then she was always being interrupted by knocks at the door, barrel-organs in the street below, or the irksome duty of having to keep one eye on a boiling pot.

Twice a week she went over to Kensington, and had a lesson from Mr. Soltz. As her father refused to give her any money she had to walk there and back, always hungry, frequently exhausted, ill-shod, shabbily dressed, rain-soaked. But her eyes continued to glow with the fire of her prescribed purposes, and a smile was ever ready on her lips.

A whole year passed before the deplorable incident in connection with the piano happened.

Lena had left school. She was over fifteen. It was pointed out to Mr. Gabril very forcibly by the other members of the family that she might

now be out earning money. There was no sign yet that all this piano-playing was going to be any good. She might go on doing it for years, and who was going to keep her? Why should she be allowed to idle about at home, strumming on a piano, when Katie had to go off every morning to a tea-shop?

Paul was out of a job, and Selma had become engaged to a flashy young man who served in the stores, and backed horses. She wanted to get married, and, of course, they had no money to start housekeeping on. That fact was probably the basis of the idea which led to the regrettable incident, that and Paul's unemployment and depravity. It is certain that at the height of this condition of discontent and disorder, Paul and Selma put their heads together. They were both desperate and without moral bias. They plotted a devilish dishonesty. One day, when everyone was out except these two, a gentleman in a bowler hat paid them a visit. He made a careful examination of the piano, and the three of them whispered together in a corner.

On the following Thursday afternoon, Lena was over at Kensington, having a lesson. Mr. Gabril was out tuning, and Katie was, of course, at business also. A van drove up. Four men in green aprons came upstairs. They picked up the "baby" as though it really were a baby. They carried it gently downstairs and deposited it in

the van. The foreman handed Paul an envelope, and they drove off. Paul and Selma had sold the piano for seventy pounds!

The plot was ingenious, but somewhat incomplete. They had taken the precaution to deal with a firm in South London, and payment was made in cash. It was obvious that they must not disappear. They must brazen the thing out. Selma was to say that she was alone in the house when the piano people called and said they had instructions to take the piano away and restore it. She knew nothing about it. She supposed it was all right. Nevertheless, it was a risky game. It all depended upon what attitude Mr. Winscombe's people might take. They might advertise. Paul and Selma would have to stick together, and lie like anything. They shared the spoil, but both felt dreadfully frightened. And, curiously enough, Selma felt less frightened of detection, than she did of Lena. What would Lena do? There was something queer and uncanny about the kid. You never knew what she would do.

It was unfortunate for Paul that the transaction was a cash one. He went out into the street with thirty-five pounds in his pocket. He was not a good subject to have so much money on him. He had never had so much before in his life. He was frightened and very desperate. He went straight down the road and had three whiskies.

Then he began to see things more clearly. There would be a row. He might be arrested, put in prison—anything. What did he care about the family? Thirty-five pounds seemed an enormous sum. He could live for months, and then perhaps something else might turn up, another scoop. He wasn't going back to that house. Of course, he had promised to stick by Selma, but still—what did it matter? Selma could look after herself. Women were always all right. Let's have a good night-out first, anyway. He went up west.

After an orgy that lasted three days and nights, he took a train to Brighton, where, in the fullness of time, he married a fat elderly lady, who owned a greengrocer's shop. His subsequent life does not concern us, but, if rumour is to be believed, he got all he deserved.

Selma was pluckier than Paul, and a little more cunning. To her surprise, Lena took the news more philosophically than she had expected. At first, of course, she believed Selma's story that they had sent for the piano to do something to it, but, even when the truth came out, that it had indeed been stolen, she only seemed a little dazed and surprised. It was as though there were within her vibrant forces that could not be deflected by the mere removal of material things.

It was Mr. Gabril who caused Selma most trouble. He was furious. He saw at once that some trick had been played, and he regarded

the playing of tricks as his own prerogative. He had, indeed, for sometime nurtured this identical idea of selling the piano, and he would have done it more efficiently. He had many friends in the piano-dealing world, friends who were capable of keeping their mouths shut, too. He would have got a good price, and he did not believe there was anything in Lena's future, or, if there were, it would take too long to materialize.

When Paul failed to return the father's suspicions naturally centred upon him. He accepted Selma's statement unquestioningly. Well, what were they going to do? Selma hinted at keeping the matter quiet.

"The piano was only lent. They will hold us responsible," she said.

"Idiot!" yelled the father. "What's the good of that? They're bound to find out in time. Besides, I'm going to find out who did this dirty trick. I'm going to have my revenge."

"Suppose it was Paul?" said Selma, turning rather pale.

"If it was Paul he can go to gaol for it. He's been there before. It's about the only place he's fit for," said the boy's father.

Selma cursed her brother in her heart. The coward! The sneak! Fancy running away, leaving her to bear the brunt of the whole danger! How like a man!

Lena was only concerned with the question as

to where she was to practise, and on what piano. She went the first thing next morning and reported the matter to Mr. Winscombe. That gentleman arrived later with a lawyer. Selma was closely cross-examined. She gave her version of the case, only omitting the fact of Paul's disappearance.

Later in the day Mr. Winscombe had an interview with Sir Robert Ashington, the music patron and owner of the piano. He was a thin, scholarly-looking old gentleman with snow-white hair.

"Well, well," he said, on hearing the clergyman's report, "what are we to do about it?"

"We have already notified the police, and Channing suggests that we might advertise it. If the firm who bought the piano are a *bona fide* firm they might be willing to come forward. But if, as is most likely, they got it for a song, they may keep quiet. It is easy enough to sell a grand piano, and comparatively easy to alter the number or change it in such a manner that after a little interval they could dispose of it with safety.

"Do you suspect the family?"

The clergyman shrugged his shoulders.

"They are a terrible crowd, sir, terrible. They are certainly capable, either individually or collectively, of doing such a thing. The father, of course, is the most likely. He is in the piano trade, and would know how to go to work."

"What about the child?"

Mr. Winscombe smiled.

"She is splendid. She came to me this morning, and there were tears in her eyes. 'Oh, Mr. Winscombe,' she said, 'don't tell me this is the end! I shall go mad if I cannot go on playing!'"

There was a certain humidity about the eyes of the older man.

"Poor child!" he said. "Well, well, let us fix her up first. She had better have a room in some respectable house we know of. I dare say we can find her another piano. I saw Soltz two days ago. He says she is making astonishing strides."

The Rev. Mr. Winscombe got busy. He had no room available in his own house, but after a rapid search he made arrangements with an American widow, who lived with her son and daughter in a large house in Regent's Park. Her name was Mrs. Bouverie Bonnington. She was a warm-hearted, sympathetic woman, interested in social questions, clever, and well read. She had a music-room and a grand piano, which was seldom used in the daytime. Her son was at college, and her daughter was not musical. She gave Lena permission to go there and play whenever she liked.

An advertisement was put in the papers, but no reply was received. Neither were the police

ever able to solve the mystery of the vanished baby grand. After a week or two, Selma breathed more freely, but she was still frightened and entirely discontented with her lot. She suffered from sleeplessness, and nightmares in which giants in green baize aprons played pitch and toss with enormous grand pianos that were for ever about to drop on her head. She determined to marry her flashy young shop-assistant at the earliest possible moment. She told him she had saved thirty-five pounds out of her housekeeping money, and he, immediately inspired by the thoughts of this noble endowment, conceived a great scheme by which it could be trebled by a cunning system of backing outsiders for small sums. Selma had no great faith in this, but after considerable discussion she advanced him ten pounds to experiment with. Unfortunately for Selma's future life, the investment was surprisingly successful. It happened during the ensuing month that several most unlikely outsiders romped home to a place. The ten pounds accrued to forty-seven pounds, and they got married and went to live in rooms at Holloway. Selma's half-share of the piano bought her married life—so she also got her deserts.

Her departure was the beginning of the slow disintegration of the whole Gabril family. Mischa went out to Canada, and they did not hear from him again. Katie wanted to come home and take

Selma's place, but Mr. Gabril could not see that there was any point in that. She was making good money: let her stop where she was. The rooms could look after themselves. The three of them pigged along as best they could.

A whole year went by. A year and eight months, and then Katie was taken suddenly ill. She had to go to a hospital and have an operation. It was not a serious operation, but in her anæmic and enfeebled condition it proved too much for her. She died under the anæsthetic.

Mr. Gabril was now running rapidly to seed. The firm still employed him, but he was entrusted with less and less orders. His income became automatically less. He began to regard Lena restlessly. It was quite time she was making money—all this talk about a great career! He had been gambling on it, perhaps foolishly. She might be earning a pound a week or so at some honest job. He went to see Mr. Winscombe, and explained.

"My dear sir," said that gentleman, "your daughter is getting on splendidly. Everyone is delighted with her. They say she will be a great artiste. But she must have time. It would be cruel to take her away now."

"How much time?"

"At least another two years. She might give lessons before then."

Two years! And he had got to keep her all that time? Oh no, the game wasn't worth it.

He growled an incoherent disapproval, borrowed five shillings from the clergyman, and came away. Something would have to be done. That evening he took Lena severely to task.

"Now, look here," he said, "that parson said you could give lessons. You'd better get busy and find some pupils. If you don't get pupils within the next week I shall take you away and put you in a job."

It happened that evening that Selma called with her husband. She seemed querulous and tearful. The betting system had been a complete failure since their marriage, and she was going to have a baby. What were they going to do? Things were bad enough as it was. How could they afford a child as well? And George was in debt up to his eyes. George did not give the impression of being in debt. He was well clothed and groomed, and his silver cigarette-case was always flashing. He laughed indulgently at his wife. All would be well when the flat-racing season started. He had had some very sound information straight out of the horse's nose-bag.

"When are you going to start making all this money?" Selma suddenly asked Lena.

"What money, Selma?"

Even Mr. Gabril was aghast at this flippant reply. Money! What did the girl think she was doing all this ivory thumping for? Fun?

Pleasure? As a matter of fact Lena had given the subject little thought. She had at times dreamed that she might one day be rich, and then she would like to go about helping people, even her own people, even Selma. But she did not associate the surging calls of her muse with making money. It was so much bigger and beyond that, so much more tremendous. Of course, she wanted to do her duty. She didn't want to be mean, but she knew that in this social struggle she was born to she had to fight her own battles.

"Perhaps I can get some pupils," she said defensively.

During the next few days she did look round and make inquiries. But pupils were not at all easy to secure. No one had heard of Lena Gabril. She looked too young to have the authority of a teacher. She consulted Mr. Winscombe, and in the end, on his recommendation, a lady in the Camden Road engaged her to teach her two little girls. She was to be paid thirty shillings a term for giving the little girls twelve lessons each.

She broke the news to her father with triumph, but to her chagrin he received it angrily.

"Thirty shillings!" he whined. "What's the good of thirty shillings? You ought to be earning thirty pounds a term."

Thirty pounds! Oh, dear! That would mean teaching forty little girls twelve hours each a term.

Four hundred and eighty hours out of the term. When was she to practise? She would have to be cunning with her father, humour him, pretend she was trying to get more and more pupils. The terrible menace of a "job" hung over her. She imagined herself in a pickle factory or a draper's shop, or perhaps out at service. The reflection drove her to work harder and harder at her piano. She said nothing about the kindness Mrs. Bonnington was showing her. She pretended she just went to a house, practised in a room, and came away without seeing anyone. She dreaded that her father might call, make a scene, borrow money, and behave in some disgraceful fashion. Some profound instinct of self-preservation prompted her to remain mute concerning the delightful lunches and teas and talks she had with Mrs. Bonnington and her son and daughter. She had discovered a new world, a world she had only been able dimly to imagine through the medium of music. She was emerging through the dark mists of her upbringing into a realm of light and understanding. She did not mean her father and stepsister to drag her back without a bitter struggle.

Two months passed before the climacteric was reached. She had not been able to get any more pupils. Her father got more and more vindictive, bitter, and inclined to violence. Mr. Gabril had been on one of his periodic orgies. He arrived

home one evening, his eyes bloodshot and his breath whisky-laden. He had spent all his money and he wanted more. Lena, of course, had none.

"Go and get some," he roared.

"Where can I get any money?" she asked.

"You lazy little slut!" he screamed, in a higher pitch. "Thirty shillings a term you earn, do you? I've been keeping you for seventeen years. To-morrow you'll come along with me. I'll get you a job with a pal of mine who runs a public-house. That's what I'll do. He said he'd give you a job—barmaid, see? In Kentish Town. You'll like it. A nice merry life, plenty of boys and booze, see? Now, you go right along to that woman in the Camden Road and collect the thirty bob she owes you, and bring it back to me at once. Go on, hurry up!"

"I couldn't do that," said Lena, colouring up. "I couldn't call there in the evening like this and ask for money."

"Oh, you couldn't, couldn't yer?" said Mr. Gabril. "You couldn't do what yer father tells yer, couldn't yer? Take that!"

And he struck at her. Lena was expecting this. She put up her arm and parried the blow. She cowered against the wall. Her eyes narrowed. She said quietly:

"All right. I'll go."

She put on her hat and cloak, tidied her hair in the broken mirror, and went slowly out. After she had gone Mr. Gabril felt ill. His heart was behaving queerly. He flopped on to the sofa and lay down.

"I want a drink," he kept on repeating, "that's what's the matter with me—hope she'll be quick. I want a drink."

He waited some time till drowsiness crept over him, and then he sank into a drunken sleep. He was next conscious of cold, discomfort, and wretchedness. He struggled through the coma to find himself. When consciousness came it seemed only partial. Where was he? What had happened? It was raw daylight, and he was lying on the sofa in the parlour. . . . Why, yes, of course, he had had a bit of a binge. But why was he here? Where was Lena? Lena? Why, yes, something had happened. Bit of a row, eh? He remembered now he had sent her out to get some money. Where was she? He called out:

"Lena!"

There was no answer. He got up and stumbled to the girl's bedroom. She was not there. Where the devil was she? He visited each room in turn, and wandered out on to the staircase. It was broad daylight, must be nearly midday, and she had gone out last night. What had happened to her? Accident? Perhaps she'd jumped into the

canal because he'd struck her. Girls were like that—silly, hysterical creatures. But Lena wasn't exactly the sort. But what was he to do? He felt ill, and he had no money. He crawled back to the sofa.

He lay there for hours in a kind of torpor, hoping that Lena would return at any moment. There was a little food in the house, but he felt too unwell to eat. Once he worked himself up into a violent fit of rage. He swore and blasphemed loudly, but, finding this only made him feel worse, he desisted. When the room began to get dark again he became desperate. He scribbled a note to Selma, telling her to come and see him at once. He got a boy on the floor below to take it, on a promise of sixpence. Then he waited in the increasing gloom.

It was three hours before Selma came. She came alone. He cursed her for being so long, and she lost her temper. When she heard of Lena's disappearance her expression became blacker still. When her father suggested accident or suicide she cried out savagely:

"Not she, you fool! That's not her luck. I felt it from the first. She's gone to her rich friends."

"Where do they live?"

"I don't know. Somewhere in Regent's Park. I've never been there. I don't know their name."

"I'll make the devils pay for this. How can we find them?"

"Mr. Winscombe would know."

"That's right, curse him! You go round now and find out. Got any money, Selma? If so, for God's sake get me a drink first."

"I haven't any money for drinks for you, but I'll go round to Mr. Winscombe."

Mr. Gabril growled, and Selma went out. She felt tired herself, but there was a sense of grim satisfaction in being able to hand her stepsister over to the father's vengeance. Mr. Winscombe was out, but he was expected in. He kept her waiting half an hour. When he arrived he said that he knew nothing about Lena's disappearance. He had not seen Mrs. Bonnington for weeks. However, he reluctantly gave Selma the name and address.

Armed with this weapon of vengeance, Selma returned to her father. She found him lying face downwards by the fireplace.

She gave a feeble scream when she felt his stiff body. Then she stood up and looked around her. The instinct of self-preservation was fortified by her condition. She had no love for her father. She looked at the sticks of furniture and reflected. She knew her father had no money. But there were three rooms furnished in a way. The whole lot would fetch several pounds. There was an

unborn child to consider, and the flat-racing season was not being any good. Who should have this furniture if not she?

She looked at the crumpled paper in her hand—Lena's address. What should she do about that? If Lena had gone to live with these people, she couldn't prevent her. She was a little frightened of educated people—indeed, a little frightened of Lena herself. Besides, if she returned she might claim her share of the furniture. She flung the paper in the fireplace. Let Lena go her own way. Let her rot.

One spring morning seven years later Selma was walking down Great Portland Street. Her right hand was holding the hand of a chubby little girl of four. Under her left arm was a bundle of washing. She took that narrow turning that runs by the side of the Queen's Hall. Suddenly her eye alighted upon the lithograph of a portrait that seemed familiar. Underneath the portrait in large black type was printed "Lena Gabrielski," and then in red type, "First appearance since her brilliantly successful American tour." Hardly had she recovered from her astonishment at recognizing Lena's portrait when a figure came down the steps from the artistes' door. It was Lena herself. The two women looked straight into each other's eyes. Lena was the first to speak.

"Selma!" she gasped.

Selma was entirely nonplussed. She did not know how to act. She let go of the child's hand and shifted the bundle from one arm to the other, as though anxious to conceal it. She looked from Lena to the poster, and said at random :

"Why do you call yourself that funny long name ?"

Lena glanced at the poster.

"Oh, that was my agent's idea. How are you, Selma, and who is this small person ?"

"It's my little girl."

Lena stooped and took the child's hand.

"And what is your name ?"

The child's eyes kindled at the vision of this beautiful lady so beautifully gowned.

She said, "Irene."

Selma stood apart, consumed with the consciousness of jarring contrast. Her own slatternliness, her bundle, her baby, and this other woman with the clothes, the manner, and faint perfume of the well bred. Could it be possible that they had the same father ? She felt angry. A tear came into her eye, and she groped for the child's hand as though anxious to escape. But the child was apparently too occupied to notice her mother's anxiety. She appeared to have suddenly made a new friend. When Lena had finished her little talk she turned to Selma and said :

"Selma, I tried to find you once or twice, but

you had moved and no one knew your address. Why didn't you write to me?''

Selma didn't know what prompted her to do it, but she felt an abrupt desire to hurt Lena, to hurt herself even more. She said bitterly :

'' Do you know it was me and Paul that stole your piano? We sold it and shared the spoil.''

Lena gave a little gasp. It was her turn to cry, but a smile struggled through her tears. She pressed her stepsister's arm.

'' Never mind, Selma. You did me a great service. If you had not taken the piano I should never perhaps have met my—my husband. And we are so happy, Selma.''

'' You—married!''

'' Yes. I married Mrs. Bonnington's son. We live at Hampstead. Won't you come and see us? I have babies of my own. I'd like to help you, Selma.''

For a moment the elder woman wavered. She dug her hard fingers tighter into the bundle of washing. Then she said :

'' Oh, what's the good?''

A policeman at the corner watched the two women interestedly. Their behaviour struck him as peculiar. Was the woman with the bundle and the baby trying to beg? It didn't seem quite like it. In fact, it looked almost the other way about. The child, too, seemed to be taking an important

part in the discussion and was appealing to its mother. Was there going to be a scene? He strolled at the law's pace in their direction. Before he reached them, however, he saw the lady hail a taxi. The three of them entered it, and drove off in the direction of Hampstead.

"Um!" he muttered to himself. "Rum creatures—women!"

BUSINESS AND DESIRES

FREDERICK JAMES SMITH stretched himself luxuriously in front of the fire of King Cup Villa. His rather lordly attitude appeared justified, as indeed it was. It may have been a little accentuated on this evening, because he had been informed that day that his salary in future was to be five pounds a week instead of three pounds fifteen—a well-merited recognition of his seven years' service to Messrs. Bole and Binspit, the famous West End firm of furnishers and upholsterers.

From the little kitchen at the back came the sound of his wife's voice humming an Indian love lyric as she washed up the sardine plates from their supper. Through the thin walls he could hear a pianola in the adjoining villa. Frederick James lighted a cigarette, and glanced at a copy of the *Evening News,* but he was too happy to read. Getting on. He enjoyed fleet glimpses of more and more getting on—infinite possibilities. They said that old Pagson, the head salesman, was making over a thousand a year. Mr. Binspit himself lived in Grosvenor Court, and had another

house at Maidenhead. It only wanted a bit of luck here and there. A romantic and interesting life—a furniture salesman's.

His wife entered the room with a handful of knives and forks, which she deposited in the plate-basket on the sideboard. He watched her sorting them out and putting them in the different compartments, as she continued to hum "Pale hands I loved." Remarkable things, women. The vision of her quickened his sense of proprietorship. Here was Gladys: wife, mother of his child, running the little villa, doing the housework and the cooking, cleaning and mending, nursing the baby, doing the shopping, keeping the accounts, and yet in the evening looking smart and sweet, even humming passionate music. Whatever her duties, she always kept a little corner for romance. And she was his, intensely and ultimately his—the thing he owned more completely than anything in the world. The instant she had adjusted the silver she darted upstairs to peep at the baby. When she returned she was no longer singing; she carried a basket full of socks, which she put down and began to examine. The master of the house spoke.

"I tell you what, old girl, we might go to the pictures to-morrow evening."

The wife and mother thoughtfully threaded a darning-needle.

"Um. We might. If I can get Bessie to

come in for a couple of hours. We mustn't be late, though."

"No."

Frederick James sat down and toyed with the poker.

"They're fairly letting that pianola go to-night, aren't they?"

"Yes. That's rather a pretty piece, isn't it?"

"Um."

They sat in silence for some time listening. Then Gladys said:

"Been busy to-day?"

The eyes of the business man lighted up.

"I should think we have! Rush, rush, rush, all day. Getting out specifications for that Tilgate job. Chap must have pots of money, having a black and white marble hall, and a walnut billiard-room. Some blokes do have luck."

"Don't *you* grumble, old thing. You're doing all right."

"I'm not grumbling. I'm only saying. I like it. There's lots of romance in the furnishing trade. You'd be surprised. Things happening all day. Rich people and that. You see into their lives. You'd be surprised the things you see. I suppose, except for doctors, no one sees so much of the inner life of the rich as the furnisher. And it's rush, rush, all the time. I get to that state when nothing surprises me. The things we see! The only rule I make is I never ask no questions.

Whatever I see in folks' houses, I say nothing. It's not my business."

He lighted another cigarette and took up the newspaper. The little cosy intimacy had helped to soothe him. He read out odd paragraphs of interest to Gladys. Then he wrote a letter to a firm of ironmongers, expressing the opinion that their estimate for repairing a sewing-machine was "excessive." He went out and posted it, and bought a packet of cigarettes. Then he came in and locked up the cat in the scullery. Gladys tidied up and turned out the gas. At a quarter past ten they were in bed.

At eight o'clock next morning they breakfasted, and at twenty-five minutes past he kissed his wife, and said :

"Well, what about the pictures to-night, dear?"

She brushed the rim of his coat-collar, and replied :

"Yes. All right. Where shall I meet you?"

"What do you say to that A.B.C. in the Strand?"

"All right."

"Righto, then. Be there at six o'clock and we'll have a couple of poached eggs on toast or a Cambridge sausage, and then we can go to one of those picture shows near Cranbourn Street."

"Right you are, dear. Don't be late."

He walked to the corner and caught his bus,

and had the good fortune to secure a strap. At four minutes to nine he was at his desk. He had put his umbrella in the corner, and was about to remove his overcoat when one of the porters came up and said :

"Mr. Smith, Mr. Binspit wants to see you in his office the moment you arrive."

"Oh!"

What was this all about? A sudden misgiving came over him that there had been a mistake about his increase. Or was he to be put up into an even more exalted position? He stared vacantly at the papers on his desk, then he walked quickly through to the Holy of Holies, and tapped on the door.

Mr. Binspit's secretary was binding up some drawings. He glanced at Frederick James, and said :

"Here *is* Smith, sir."

"Come in, Smith."

The head of the firm stood up. He was a tall, imperturbable, elderly man with polished manners, and a beautifully tonsured beard. He remarked :

"Let's see, what are you doing, Smith?"

"I'm on the Tilgate job, sir."

"You must leave it. I want you to come with me. Get your order-book, and meet me down at the front door in five minutes' time."

'Yes, sir."

In four and a half minutes' time Smith was

standing by the front door like a sentry on duty. Mr. Binspit did not keep him waiting. He came through in the impressive manner that had been one of the assets of his career. He ignored Frederick James and walked straight through on to the pavement. His car was waiting. He pointed to a seat.

"Get in."

The car glided up Oxford Street. The chief twirled his moustache. As they were passing Hyde Park he condescended to remark :

"We are going to Richmond. A new client, Mr. Marshall Flaxton—American. Appears to be in a great hurry. I don't know what the job is. You may have to stay there all day."

"That's all right, as long as I get to the A.B.C. in the Strand at six o'clock in time to meet the missus," thought Frederick, but he only said :

"Yes, sir."

The run to Richmond lasted less than half an hour. The car entered the park and took a side road in the direction of Kew. Suddenly it entered a drive between long beds of rhododendrons in full bloom, and came to a halt before the portico of a large Queen Anne house. The front door was open, and a man, who had apparently been expecting them, stepped forward and nodded. He was a small, oldish man with cracked parchmenty skin and keen brown eyes. He said :

"Bole and Binspit?"

Mr. Binspit bowed. "I am Mr. Binspit. This is one of my junior salesmen."

Mr. Marshall Flaxton glanced at them both, and to Frederick's surprise he felt that he himself was the object of the greater interest.

"Come right in."

They walked across the hall. The house was apparently empty and unoccupied, but Mr. Flaxton called up the staircase:

"Ella! They've come!"

There was the sound of hurrying footsteps on the bare boards, and almost immediately a stoutish old lady came hurrying downstairs. She appeared flurried and out of breath. She ejaculated:

"Morning!" and put her hand to her heart. Frederick was equally aware when she glanced at him that there was something about his appearance which occasioned surprise.

Mr. and Mrs. Flaxton exchanged glances, then he turned briskly to Mr. Binspit and said:

"Now, if you don't mind, I'll do the talking. Time presses."

There were a series of reception-rooms connected by folding doors. Mr. Flaxton turned to Frederick and said:

"Shorthand?"

"Yes, sir."

"Get out notebook. Room one: Hepplewhite drawing-room suite, two Chinese lacquer cabinets,

Turkey carpet, felt surround—got that? Right! Two majolica vases for overmantel. Heavy brocade curtains in style, three full-length portraits, Georgian period, gilt Italian coffer—got that? Right! Come on. Room two."

Before Mr. Flaxton had reached room five the eyes of the imperturbable Mr. Binspit were starting out of his head. Frederick was unmoved. He went on calmly entering the instructions in his notebook. Mrs. Flaxton trotted along in the rear like a faithful sheepdog.

"The man must be mad," thought Binspit. But the reputation of Marshall Flaxton, the nitrate and potash king, was good enough to justify a little insanity. At room five a French window opened on to a conservatory. Mr. Flaxton said to Frederick:

"Go in there and roughly estimate cubic dimensions."

Frederick James stepped through, and then, as he stood on the other side, owing to the echo of the empty rooms, he overheard a remark not intended for his ears. He heard Mr. Flaxton say:

"Is this the kind of fellow who can mind his own business?"

And he heard Mr. Binspit answer:

"I chose him for that purpose. I think he is the kind of man you asked for."

They went over the whole house. There was to be no painting nor decorating, no arrangements

for lighting, nothing done to the kitchen ; but the house was to be filled with costly furniture, carpets, curtains, pictures, and bric-à-brac. When the party eventually arrived back in the hall, Mr. Binspit cleared his throat, and said in his best manager-directing voice :

"Well, Mr. Flaxton, I think your wishes are quite clear. We can let you have a specification and estimate in the course of a week or so."

Mr. Flaxton took out his watch.

"It's five minutes of ten," he muttered, as if to himself, then, tapping the other on the forearm, he exclaimed : "I didn't ask you for a specification or an estimate ! It's five minutes of ten ! I want the job done by three o'clock to-day !"

"Er—excuse me, do I understand——"

"I want the job done by three o'clock to-day."

"I'm afraid it's quite impossible."

"How many men do you employ ?"

"Oh, several thousand altogether—scattered about."

"You can call them off other jobs."

"I'm afraid the cost would be——"

"I didn't ask about the cost. Aren't there automobiles and motor-lorries ? Aren't there telephones ? Haven't you any stock ? Is London bereft of old furniture ? Is your firm bereft of enterprise ? I repeat—I didn't ask about the cost."

The pupils of Mr. Binspit's eyes seemed to

narrow to a pin-point. He looked like a terrier watching the approach of a rabbit, and yet not quite convinced that it really was a rabbit. He fidgeted with his handsome beard, and took several paces up and down the hall. In the meantime Mr. Flaxton jerked out :

"Section it out. Fifteen salesmen—each responsible for a room. Order fleet of motor-lorries to be ready by twelve o'clock. Have fifty men waiting here for them. So many detailed to each room. Holy Moses ! there's nothing to do but put the furniture in its place."

"But the carpets, the curtains," wailed Mr. Binspit despairingly.

"Excuse me, sir," suddenly remarked Frederick James quietly. "There are those brocade curtains which are now ready for Lord Gastwych St. James. I believe they would be just the size for these rooms."

"Bright lad !" chirped Mr. Flaxton.

"But Lord Gastwych was in yesterday. He was complaining——"

"To hell with the lord ! I'll pay you three times what he's paying."

Frederick James again spoke :

"Excuse me, sir, but if Mr. Flaxton could have the surrounds stained instead of laying down a felt it could be done quickly, and with that stain we use now it dries in half an hour. In that case there would be no difficulty, if those curtains fit."

"Good! that's right, boy. Telephone at once for forty French polishers to come down in taxi-cabs. There's a telephone in that little room by the lavatory."

Mr. Binspit eventually found himself caught up in the whirl of his client's enthusiasms. He telephoned for nearly a hundred workmen to come down at once in taxi-cabs. He gave instructions that no one was to leave the premises of Bole and Binspit, and that all salesmen and workmen on outside jobs were to report instantly. Then he took Frederick's shorthand notes and went off in his car, leaving Frederick to act as a kind of foreman.

When his chief had gone, Frederick wandered through the rooms planning the campaign. He left Mr. and Mrs. Flaxton whispering together in the hall. He had not been left to his own devices for ten minutes before a car drove up to the door, and there was a violent ringing of the bell. He walked through into the hall, feeling that it was perhaps his place to open the door, but Mr. Flaxton had forestalled him. He observed a young, fair, and pretty girl in a great fluster of excitement. The first words she uttered were:

"Well, pop, nothing been heard of the Count?"

"Not a sign."

"Who the——"

Frederick was conscious of being scrutinized by

a pair of deep grey startled eyes. Mr. Flaxton glanced abruptly over his shoulder and ejaculated :

"The upholsterer's man. They've promised to make good by three o'clock."

"Fine ! But, say, did you ever——"

As Frederick withdrew to the inner room he distinctly caught the phrase : "Most extraordinary resemblance."

It was not his business to take an excessive interest in his client's affairs and conversations, and he was just measuring the width of the bay in the second drawing-room when he saw another car drive up and three Chinamen get out. One was gorgeously apparelled, obviously a potentate of some sort, accompanied by two secretaries. They rang the bell, and he heard Mr. Flaxton admit them.

"Sixteen feet three inches by five feet four and a half," murmured Frederick, making a note in his book. Then he looked up and found Mrs. Flaxton standing at his elbow. She appeared agitated. She beckoned him to accompany her into the further room. When they arrived there, she whispered :

"Hide your notebook, Mr.—er——"

"Smith, madam."

"Mr. Smith, do not be alarmed about anything. You shall be well recompensed for any inconvenience. Something unexpected has happened. There is no time to enter into details ; but

for certain purposes, which are very urgent—very pressing—we may wish to pass you off as someone you are not. Quite temporarily, you understand."

"Yes, madam."

"Thank you very much. Hallo! what's this?"

A line of taxis began to stream up the drive. It was the vanguard of the army of French polishers and workmen.

"My! we must keep this bunch out for a bit. Mr. Smith, please run and tell them to wait on the tennis-court. Tell them we're not quite ready for them. But—in the meantime, wait till I have got His Excellency out of the way. I won't be two minutes."

"Yes, madam."

The bell began to ring, but Frederick waited discreetly for three or four minutes; then he went out and faced a small crowd of men with carpet-bags in the porch.

"I say, you fellows," he said, "the guv'nor's not quite ready yet. He says will you hang around over by that tennis-court? Watkins, will you stay here and tell the others as they come up?"

As he closed the door he heard the men lighting their pipes and shuffling up. He turned round. Mrs. Flaxton was waiting for him.

"Come," she said.

He followed her upstairs. His Excellency—whoever he was—was seated on a packing-case fanning himself, and all the rest were standing around in respectful attitudes. Mrs. Flaxton took his arm and led him up to the group. Then, bowing very low, she said :

"Your Excellency, this is Antonio, the son of Count Androssi."

One of the secretaries interpreted the introduction. His Excellency bowed to Frederick. Frederick, who felt it his duty to live up to his instructions, bowed low in response. There was a whispered confabulation in Chinese ; then the interpreter said :

"His Excellency would be glad to have an assurance from Signor Antonio Androssi that he formally waives his claim."

Mr. Flaxton turned and gripped Frederick's forearm, in the meantime giving him a comprehensive glance.

"Of course he does. On the contrary, Signor Antonio is now my daughter's fiancé. Isn't that so ?"

"That's right," said Frederick.

"His Excellency would be glad to have the assurance in writing."

"Of course, of course !"

A sheet of foolscap was produced, and Mr. Flaxton wrote down the following :

"I, Antonio Bruno Androssi, of Vallimbrossa,

do hereby formerly waive my claim to the hand of Rhoda Mallesta, and to all rights in the island kingdom of Paray. Signed . . .''

''Here you are, my son,'' said Mr. Flaxton, handing Frederick the document and a fountain-pen.

Frederick balanced the paper on a window-sill and copied the name ''Antonio Bruno Androssi.'' Mr. Flaxton and one of the Chinamen witnessed the signature, and it was handed to His Excellency, who immediately concealed it in some mysterious crevice in his apparel, bowed, and spoke again.

''His Excellency wishes the two young people the joy of the twenty-seven nights of The White Flamingo.''

Frederick muttered quietly, ''Thanks awfully,'' and bowed again. Then the Chinese contingent took their departure. As they were going out of the hall Mrs. Flaxton whispered to Frederick :

''Oh, Mr. Smith, thank you so much. You've been splendid.''

''That's all right, madam. Now, what about these carpets?''

''Just two minutes.''

By this time the park was beginning to assume the character of a military dump. Motor-vans were drawn up in line. Taxis were standing two deep by the outside rails. Workmen were lying about in luxurious attitudes among the flower-

beds. When the car with the Chinamen had departed, Frederick was instructed to call the men in and impress them with the urgency of the work. Half an hour later Mr. Binspit returned. The curtains of Lord Gastwych St. James happened to fit admirably. The house resounded with the blows of hammers and the swish of brushes and the groan of heavy furniture being carried hither and thither. A dozen men were detailed for each room. At first there seemed to be no disposition to hurry at all. The British workman deeply resents any attempt at speeding-up. The popular commentary was :

"What's this blinking job all about, anyway ?"

Then Mr. Flaxton rushed around and announced that there would be a bonus of sixty pounds to be divided between the twelve men whose room was finished first. This considerably accelerated matters. By half-past one the carpets were laid, the staining was done, the curtains were up, and the furniture was being rushed in at a dangerous speed. Frederick James walked hither and thither, saying quietly :

"Righto ! Steady ! Steady !"

The Flaxton family went off in their car to get lunch at an hotel in Richmond. And Mr. Binspit did the same. Frederick James was too occupied to think about food.

"Steady ! Steady ! That's right. Room seven."

At five minutes to two, four dark, foreign-looking men appeared. They pushed their way through the throng. Frederick again observed that he was an object of someone else's keen interest. He was, however, too preoccupied to pay the foreigners much attention. Probably they were friends of Mr. Flaxton's.

After regarding him furtively they went off to a corner to whisper together. Frederick James was extremely busy. He was standing by the top of the staircase leading to the basement when one of these men touched him on the shoulder and whispered :

"It is very, very important. Will you come down to the basement for one second ?"

Frederick James looked annoyed, but he followed the man downstairs. The basement was deserted. They had no instructions to supply anything for it. There were a series of rambling stone corridors and kitchens and wash-houses leading to a yard at the back, where there were stables and garages and a kitchen-garden.

He followed the men for twenty yards or so down the corridor, when suddenly someone sprang out from some break in the wall and gripped him from behind. A cloth saturated with some pungent liquid was whipped across his face. He was gagged and pinioned. He felt himself being carried, and he knew that he was losing consciousness. The last thing that he remembered was

being on a comfortable spring-seat and hearing the sudden whirr of a self-starter in a car.

"They'll never get the job done without me," he thought, and then he swam away into some dark void.

The next thing he was acutely aware of was that the spring-seat had become unaccountably hard. It was swaying slightly, too—not at all the motion of a car. There was a gentle lapping sound quite near his head. He could hear the rumble of voices, but he could not hear what was said. Then a face appeared through a trap-door above him, an old, battered, gnarled face that might be flesh and blood or might be beaten copper. The jaws were moving with the slow circular movements of the tobacco-chewer. One eye surveyed him ; the other seemed to be looking over the owner's shoulder. The voice said :

"Hallo, Dago. Parly Italiano, huh ?"

Frederick James eagerly sucked in the draught of fresh air. Then he called out :

"I say, what's the game ?"

The face above turned sideways and addressed some unseen person.

"The blighter's awake. He talks English."

Another face appeared, a younger one, with a black beard and a deep scar on the left jaw. It must have been a very small boat, and it was apparently not moving. Frederick James repeated :

"What's the game, you chaps?"

The swivel-eyed man replied:

"The game's all right, my lad. We're waiting for the guv'nor's orders to get way on."

"Where are we going?"

The two faces continued chewing, and the black-bearded man expectorated over the edge of the boat. They were apparently not unfriendly, only somewhat callous, and utterly bored with having to hang about. The swivel-eyed man regarded him thoughtfully, then withdrew. Then the head of the black-bearded man appeared.

"Where are we going?" again asked Frederick.

The black-bearded man studied him for several minutes but said nothing. He also withdrew, and Frederick heard them talking together above.

"It's a bit thick," thought the junior furniture salesman. "One has to do things to oblige a client, but—reely!"

His arms and legs were pinioned, and the plank was very hard. He had had nothing to eat or drink since breakfast, but what he felt most in need of was—information. As quietly as he could he sat up on his haunches, then rolled over and got on to his knees. They had left the hatch open, and he strained his neck at an uncomfortable angle trying to get his ear to the opening without showing his head. At first he could not catch what

was said; then he distinctly heard Swivel-Eye say:

"When you've been with the guv'nor as long as I 'ave, mate, you won't ask too many questions."

There was a silence; then the black-bearded man remarked:

"Well, I'll bet yer a thousand quid to a quartern of unsweetened that this bloke isn't a Dago at all."

There was another pause, and then the other answered:

"All I can say is, if 'e ain't there'll be the devil to pay when the guv'nor turns up."

"What d'you think's the game this time?"

"I know nothin'. All I know is we pick up the *Zephyr* to-night, after sundown, when she's cleared port, and we stow away these barrels of what they call potash, and what other folks call dope, and we tumble the lot, including this guy, into the hold, and then clear. Them was the guv'nor's instructions."

"Where's it for?"

"Cape Horn. Pacific route to some blinkin' little port in the Malay Straits. They won't make it for two months, if then."

A terrible temptation came over Frederick James to thrust his head through the opening and exclaim:

"Look here, that's a bit thick! I can't go out

to the Malay Straits. I've got to meet the missus at six o'clock at an A.B.C."

But he restrained himself. The need for caution and information was very great. The black-bearded man was laughing :

"The guv'nor won't half be pleased if he finds out in two months' time that they've got the wrong guy. Lumme ! what a game ! What's at the back of it all, Pete ?"

"Bizness."

"Bizness ! 'Ow d'you mean—bizness ?"

"Bizness is at the back of most things. Look 'ere, 'ere's a guess. Mind you, I know nothin', nothin' at all, see ?"

"I ain't a blabber."

"Supposin' yer take two groups of what they call interests grabbin' on the same claim. This potash-dope line, d'yer see ? The Androssia and the guv'nor on one side, and this 'ere American and the Barocchis on the other. It's known that the big bug on the whole scheme is this Chink—what's 'is name ?—Ah Seng Tse. He 'ands round the concessions and that. See ? But 'e wants to keep a grip on the place 'isself. This island where they make the 'eadquarters, you know—Paray, isn't it ? The Androssia want to butt in, and the chance comes to work this blitherin' son of a goat off on the woman who's practically the queen of the island. See ? But the young Count is a bad boy. 'E's off some-

where chasing some fairy from a chorus. The American sees 'is chance and cuts in. Blows the gaff on 'em all. Cuts Androssi out, announces 'e's marryin' 'is daughter—anythin' just to quieten the Chink, throw sand in 'is eyes. Cuts in with a new claim for concessions. The Androssis are in Paris huntin' up the son and heir. But someone gets wind of it. Some of his gang cop the lad, smuggle 'im off, and there 'e is—bound for 'is blinkin' island kingdom and 'is bloomin' princess. Mind yer, I know nothin', nothin' at all.''

Frederick James thrust his head boldly through the opening, and said :

''I say, you chaps, I've had no dinner. Is there any chance of getting a cup of tea?''

''Well, I'm damned!'' remarked Swivel-Eye ; then he nodded and said :

''Certainly, my lord. 'Orace, put the kettle on the lamp, and make 'is lordship a cup of tea.''

To Frederick's surprise ''Orace'' did as he was bidden. The two seamen grinned, and Swivel-Eye muttered :

''You're a rum 'un, you are. Better lie down and not show yer 'ead above deck.''

''But, look here, can't you chaps let me go? It don't matter to you, does it?''

''When you see the guv'nor, you'll know why we can't let you go. What do you say yer name is?''

"Frederick James Smith. I'm an assistant-salesman to Messrs. Bole and Binspit."

"Sounds familiar. Better keep yer yarn ready to tell the guv'nor."

"Where are we?"

"We're lying up—waiting the guv'nor's orders."

It seemed hopeless to try to get any more information out of his captors. He waited patiently. In a few minutes the man with the black beard handed him down a cup of tea. His wrists were tied, but his hands were sufficiently free to grip the cup. When he had drunk it the black-bearded man actually handed him a cigarette and lighted it, at the same time adding :

"Mind you put that out when the guv'nor comes. 'E don't like smoking in the state-room. Yer might spoil the plush carpets."

Frederick thanked him, and smoked in silence.

Barely ten minutes elapsed before there was a sound of oars rattling in rowlocks, and the lapping increased in violence. One of the men called down to him :

"'E's comin'. Pull yerself together."

When the face of the "guv'nor" appeared above the hatch Frederick instantly realized the force of Swivel-Eye's remark as to not letting him go. It was an enormous, puffy face, with protruding eyes, a square jaw, and deep malevolent eyes. A voice said :

"Sit up, please!"

Frederick James did as he was told. The other glanced at him, and then his face changed colour. The centre of his face seemed to go white and the outside rim of it scarlet. And then the voice rang out. Frederick James had always contended that for foul language and profanity the furnishing trade was not to be beaten, but in the brief minute that followed he realized that his colleagues were merely amateurs at the game. He had never heard such a rich, fruitful and varied vocabulary. The anger was not expended on Frederick himself, or even on the two seamen, but on some unfortunate individual named Shale. The boat rocked with the violence of his anger and elocution. He drew back and growled at the others. Frederick reared himself up to listen. He heard Swivel-Eye say something, and then the thunder of the guv'nor's voice:

"I don't want him blabbing. Better cut his throat and throw him in the river."

The wretched victim was left guessing as to the outcome of this command, as the three of them drew away to the stern of the boat and whispered.

"It's a bit thick," thought Frederick. The discussion seemed to go on for an eternity. At length the face of the guv'nor appeared again, and an enormous hand came down and gripped him by the hair.

"Look here—you, you little bone-headed sewer

rat. I'm sending you back. But not a word of this ever—see?—not to—no one. It's no good your giving me your word of honour, because that wouldn't cut any ice at all. But if ever it comes out that you've blabbed a word, I'll come for you from the ends of the earth. I'll put my foot in the small of your back and break you clean in half. Savvy?"

"All right, sir. Thank you very much."

The guv'nor withdrew, and the black-bearded man came down and released him. In less than five minutes he was on a dinghy, being rowed in the direction of a group of deserted buildings. The black-bearded man rowed, and the guv'nor accompanied him. They landed and walked through two long empty warehouses. At the end of the farther one was a yard, where they found a large car and a chauffeur. Frederick was told to get inside, and the guv'nor spoke to the chauffeur. To his relief he found that he was to go unaccompanied. Just as they were starting the guv'nor put his head in the door and said:

"You'll bear in mind what I said."

And the expression on his face was a thing that Frederick James would be likely to bear in mind all his life.

The car glided off and turned westwards. The pace increased as they reached the high road. They passed through a busy, rather dirty town, which Frederick guessed to be Gravesend. They

were in the outskirts of London in less than half an hour. It was exactly twenty-five minutes to six when they pulled up at the corner of Oxford Street. The chauffeur came round and opened the door.

"You get out here," he said.

Frederick did not require any encouragement. He hesitated whether he ought to offer the chaffeur a tip, but decided that if he did he could not give him less than two shillings, and that disbursement might make him short for the evening's entertainment, so he merely nodded and said :

"Good afternoon, sir. Thank you very much."

He walked round the corner and entered the premises of Messrs. Bole and Binspit. Everything seemed to be going on as usual. He walked through to Mr. Binspit's office and met that gentleman coming out. He was apparently in a genial mood. He exclaimed :

"Hallo, Smith. Are you better?"

"I'm all right, sir."

"Someone told me that you had fainted, and had gone home in a cab."

Frederick equivocated.

"I'm better now, sir."

"A queer affair, that Richmond job. We got it done practically to time. Then the client didn't want it after all. It seems that someone who was expected didn't turn up, or came too soon,

or something. He settled up, though—every penny."

"Oh!"

"Good-night. You had better get on to that Tilgate job to-morrow."

At five minutes past six Frederick found Gladys seated at their usual table in the A.B.C. in the Strand.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he said.

"It's all right. Been busy, dear?"

"Oh yes. The usual thing: rush, rush, rush, all day. What are you going to have? Poached eggs or Cambridge sausage?"

"Cambridge sausage, I think."

"Righto. Pot of tea for two, and two Cambridge sausages, please, miss."

They ate their high tea in silence, finishing up with jam and buns.

"Milly called this afternoon," remarked Gladys. "She says Fanny Stone—you know that red-haired girl you didn't like, used to giggle—she's got engaged to a feller in the City with pots of money."

"Reely?"

After a mature interval Frederick James Smith indulged in further commentary.

"It's a rum thing—money and business. A chap was saying to-day business is at the back of all troubles, trying to get on and that. The

things people do for money ! You'd be surprised. Look at our line. I don't suppose anyone, 'cept p'r'aps doctors, sees so much of the inner life of the rich as we do in the furnishing trade. The things we see ! The way some of these rich folks go on. You'd never believe it. Of course, I never ask no questions. A client's private business is none of mine. P'r'aps that's why I'm getting on a bit. But it's rush, rush, rush, all the time."

Frederick payed the bill, and they walked out.

"Why, only to-day, you'd never believe what I've had to do."

"What have you been doing to-day ?"

"Oh, it's just been one big rush. And I—I've waived a kingdom, and refused the hand of a princess ; got engaged to an American millionaire's daughter ; been kidnapped ; was nearly sent to China ; was threatened with having my throat cut—all in my spare time, like. You'd never believe it."

"No, I certainly shouldn't !" Gladys screwed up her eyes. "You're a funny old thing ! Why, look ! Charlie Chaplin's on at that one."

"Charlie Chaplin !" replied Frederick. "Oh, we get enough Charlie Chaplin in our business. I'd rather see something romantic. What about that one over there, 'Love ? or a Kingdom ?' featuring Pauline Passionella ?"

"All right, dear. Whichever you like."

As they walked towards the ticket-office, Frederick whispered:

"'Love? or a Kingdom?' What do you think?"

She gave his arm a gentle pressure, and they passed through.

THE ROOM

THE Room was in Praxton Street, which is not very far from the Euston Road. It was fifteen feet by ten feet six inches. It had a door and a window. The window was covered by stiff lace curtains with several tears in them, framed by red plush curtains, which, if pulled together, failed to meet by nearly a yard. The furniture consisted of a circular mahogany table, a Victorian sideboard with mirrors inset in the panels above, a narrow-seated horsehair chair which had a tendency to shoot the occupant into the fireplace, two other mahogany chairs with green velvet seats, a white enamelled flower-stand supporting a puce-coloured earthenware pot in which a dismal aspidistra struggled for existence. In the angle between the door and the window was an iron frame supporting what proved to be a bed by night and a dumping ground for odds and ends by day. The wall was papered with a strange pattern of violet and pink flowers leaping in irregular waves ceilingwards. On the walls were many framed oleographs, one of the Crucifixion, one of a small boy holding a piece of sultana cake on a plate, and a

large collie dog regarding the cake with melancholy greed. There was a photograph of somebody's husband with a square beard and a white stock, two water-colours of some foreign country characterized by blue mountains reflected in a lake, and a large print of the coronation of King George. On the floor was a yellow and red carpet of indeterminate pattern worn right through in all the most frequented spots of the room. Around the gas chandelier a dozen or so flies played their eternal game of touch.

Now this is a brief description of inanimate objects—except for the flies. But we all know that even inanimate objects—particularly a collection of inanimate objects—have a soul. That is to say that they subtly affect everyone on the spiritual plane. Perhaps it would be safer to say that they have a message.

To James Wilbraham Waite, seated on the horsehair chair on a bright July afternoon, they brought an abrupt message. He looked around the room and he said to himself out aloud:

"This is simply hell!"

He had occupied this room in the lodging-house for seven years, and it had taken all this time to breed in him the special kind of intense loathing and hate which he felt at that moment. It was not the quick hate of sudden anger. It was the slow combustible passion of years of disappointment and dissatisfaction. The room seemed to

embody in itself all that he detested and yearned to avoid.

His father had been a small Essex farmer, and James Wilbraham had spent his boyhood on the farm. Owing, however, to Mr. Waite senior's lack of concentration on the commercial side of the farm, and his too great concentration on the good stuff served over the bar of the Dog and Destiny, he went bankrupt and died soon after. His wife had died many years before, and James Wilbraham, being an only son, found himself at the age of eighteen alone in the world without even a mangel-wurzel to his name. He was a dreamy boy, loving an open-air life. He had done fairly well at the Grammar School. He had no head for mathematics, but excelled at theoretical subjects, which brought him no credit or marks. When his father died there was apparently nothing for him to do but become a farm hand. One of the masters at the school, who had taken an interest in him, did his best to dissuade him from this course. His name was Mr. Flint, and he pointed out the hopeless future of manual labour without capital. He emphasized the fact that James had had quite a good education and that he was intelligent, and that he had only to use his brains to make his way in the world. For two years James fought against the good advice of his friend. He worked for a local farmer, and he might be working for the same farmer now but

for the fact that he fell in love with a girl he had seen walking about the streets of Pondersham. He never spoke to her, but she stirred some profound note in his nature. It was less the girl herself, perhaps, than the idea of love in the abstract. She was what was known as a lady, inaccessible, remote, fragile as a china vase. He began to regard his rough hands and coarse clothes with misgiving. And then one day he went to the pictures with an acquaintance and found himself suddenly projected into a world of magnificent Life, spelt with a very large L, where gorgeous women flashed in and out of priceless automobiles, and powdered flunkeys ushered them into marvellous palaces. The contrast was too violent. If ever he wanted to possess one of these splendid creatures—well, he could never do so as a farm hand.

His ideas of farming had never been academic, to put it mildly. He had inherited a great deal of his father's vagueness. During his father's lifetime he had regarded the soil as a mysterious substitute for a mother. It succoured him with the good things he liked, and made few calls on his industry. He liked to ride over it, and see the little green shoots budding. Then he would dream by a pond, or idle the hours away with a dog and a ferret.

Consequently when he informed his employer one day, with a sigh, that he had decided to give

up farming, that gentleman accepted his resignation with unblushing satisfaction. Through the influence of Mr. Flint he got a situation as a clerk in a corn chandler's at Pondersham. He earned seventeen and sixpence a week, and managed to keep himself—in a state of chronic hunger.

He endured this life for over a year, when again through the influence of Mr. Flint he considerably improved his position. For he obtained a situation at a scholastic employment agency in London at a salary of thirty shillings a week. It was then that he made his first introduction to the Room. He paid twelve shillings and sixpence a week for it, and that included a breakfast, consisting of tea and a boiled egg. To record his career during the seven years that led up to this particular July afternoon would be tedious in the extreme. It seemed to centre entirely around the Room. By half-crowns and five shillings his salary had now risen to three pounds five shillings. During the next seven years by similar processes it might conceivably rise to five pounds. He would then be thirty-five. But it was not these material considerations and prospects alone which disturbed him. It was that eternal sense of ingrained discontent.

He detested his work. At his desk he was always dreaming. He dreamt of far-off countries, and beauty, and love, and romance. He joined a local library and spent most of his evenings alone

reading. And when he had been completely transported into another world he would look up and find himself in the Room. He would catch his own reflection in the crazy mirrors, the boy and sultana cake and the collie dog would appear to be grinning at him insipidly from the wall, the vision of King George in his coronation robes only produced in him a sense of acrid disloyalty. The wallpaper leaping towards the ceiling made him want to scream. Even when he turned out the gas and went to bed he was intensely conscious of enveloping ugliness.

On this particular afternoon his venom focussed on the flies around the chandelier. He had come home early—it was a slack time at the office—and he was reading a novel with a setting in the desert. He became absorbed with visions. He saw the sleepy pile of grey and white buildings against the vivid green of date-palms in an oasis. He could hear the distant sounds of strange music, and breathe the rich perfumes of the African night. Then suddenly he looked up and saw those London flies playing their ridiculous game beneath the chandelier. He felt maddened. He put down the book and made a swipe at them with his handkerchief. They dispersed only to reform a few seconds later. He hit at them again and again without any tangible result. Then he sat down and thought.

"I want a holiday," he said to himself. "My

nerves are in a rotten state." Owing to the exigencies of office work he had had his fortnight's holiday in April. He would not get another until—some time next year. And then he would probably go to Hastings, or Bognor, or worse. It was awful, unendurable.

"I won't have you here," he suddenly said to the flies. There was a look of grim determination on his face. He picked up a towel and slightly damped it, and began a fresh campaign. He soon realized that to hit them in the air was a chance in a hundred. You have to wait till they settle. He tracked them about the room. He killed several on the table, quite a lot on the wall and the window, but nothing seemed to make any difference to the party under the chandelier. He made wild swipes at them and actually hit several on the wing, but back they came. This persistence was either astonishing pluck or astonishing stupidity. It was almost uncanny. He struck wildly at one on the chandelier itself, and then—crash! down came the globe and smashed on the floor. A few minutes later he heard the ponderous steps of his rheumaticky landlady coming up the stairs. He gripped the towel hard. He felt uncertain of himself. "If the old fool makes a fuss about that globe I'll give her a swipe," his mind registered. There was the familiar tap on the door and it opened.

To his surprise she held out a letter. She had

not apparently heard the globe smash, neither did she notice it.

"Mrs. Bean's just left this," she said. "It came this morning, but it was addressed to seventy-five."

He took the letter, and said "Thanks;" then, feeling that his passions were somewhat vented, he pointed to the globe and said casually:

"I'm afraid I broke the globe, hitting at a fly."

She said: "Oh, dear! H'm! I'll go and get a dustpan and brush. My legs are that bad."

"I'll get it for you if you like," he answered, feeling suddenly quite amiable.

"I wish you would, Mr. Waite; it's under the kitchen dresser."

The business of getting the dustpan and brush, clearing up the broken glass, and listening to a story about the shocking pain Mr. Bean was suffering with his kidney trouble occupied ten minutes. She went at last and he opened the letter. It was from a firm of lawyers in Liverpool informing him that an uncle of his had recently died in Canada, and under the terms of the will he was the inheritor of approximately six hundred pounds.

Six hundred pounds! For the first time he stared at the Room with unseeing eyes. It had no horrors for him. He saw right through the mahogany sideboard and the leaping wallpaper out into the great broad spaces of the world.

Gulls screamed above the heaving decks of a mighty ship. He saw white cities with minarets and mosques glittering in the sun. There were valleys aglow with myriad flowers. A woman was coming towards him——

The desire to talk to someone about his amazing news was irresistible. He knew no one in the house except the landlady. He went downstairs and found her ironing some flannel underclothing in the kitchen. He said :

"I say, Mrs. Beldam, I've come in for some money."

The landlady looked up at him with an expression of greedy interest. She said :

"Oh, that's nice, I must say. How much is it?"

"About six hundred pounds."

She looked down at her flannel petticoat. She was cautiously balancing the potentialities of the situation. She couldn't exactly see how she was to come in over this. All it would amount to would be that she would probably lose a lodger. She repeated :

"That's nice." Then, after blowing on her iron, she added :

"You take my advice, young man, and put it all in War Savings Certificates."

"War Savings Certificates!"

He looked at her with horror. Ah! he could see through it all. This social conspiracy to keep

him in the Room. Here was the golden key to freedom, and this woman, this state, social life itself, talked to him about War Savings Certificates. Not likely! He barked at her:

"We shall see," and almost ran out of the room.

It was nearly a month before he got his cheque. In the meantime he had been carefully maturing his plans. He bought maps, and guides, and works of reference. He gave the scholastic agency a week's notice, and when he was free he devoted his time to reading and polishing up his French, at which he had been fairly proficient at school.

The Room, if anything, seemed more hideous than before. He felt himself already superior to it; nevertheless he was still a little frightened. It had for so long dominated him, with its drab menace, he could not believe that he would ever really escape from its clutches. He dreamed of some feral vengeance. Perhaps on the last night he would get busy with an axe or a poker. But no, this would be very foolish. He would be made to pay, and so the Room would score off him.

And so one day in early September he gave up the key of the Room to the landlady and left it for ever.

He had about fifty pounds in cash on him. With the rest of the money he had bought a

Worldwide Letter of Credit. What destiny had in store for him when the money was spent he neither knew nor cared. He was achieving his supreme ambition—to escape.

Four days later he arrived at Algiers, tired, bewildered, but very excited. He regarded Algiers as a good kicking-off place for his adventures. He wanted to get to the desert, but, knowing nothing of the country, he didn't know how to proceed. He stayed there for a week in a quiet hotel, wandering about, and getting lost in the maze of the Arab quarter. The city repelled him a little with its large hotels and terraces of French villas. Even the Arab quarter had a sense of unreality. He felt every moment that he might step out and find himself in the Earl's Court Road. One day at lunch he got into conversation with a Frenchman, who told him about a journey he was about to take to Laghouat in the south. James Wilbraham pricked up his ears. The Frenchman, it appeared, was a traveller in rugs and bric-à-brac. He was making the journey with a companion, and they were going by car. Yes, there were only the three of them, including the chauffeur, and if James cared to join them and pay his share—the contract was concluded then and there.

Three days later the party left. They motored the whole of the first day through the richly fertile country of Northern Algeria, and spent the

night at Boghari up in the hills. The two Frenchmen talked the whole time, and James gathered about one-third of their conversation, which was mostly about women, the rate of exchange, French politics, and trade. At Boghari it was very cold and overcast.

The seeker after romance began to feel depressed that night. It was all very beautiful, of course, but somehow things were not for the moment shaping in the way he had hoped. A motor-car was an unromantic way of travelling, and French commercial travellers can be very boring. He felt a tripper, an alien. He wondered whether he would ever fit into any milieu in which he found himself. In the early morning he dreamt he was back in the Room, and the chairs, and tables, and lace curtains were laughing at him.

The next day, however, the car wound its way down into the plain below, and they began to approach the desert. By midday it was very hot. They lunched at Djerfa on fish soup, bustard stewed in oil, and Algerian wine. The food nauseated James, but the Frenchmen became more and more garrulous. He wanted to get on to where romance would begin. At last they started, and all the afternoon the car raced on down a straight road through endless tracks of sand dotted with scrub, clumps of coarse grass, and occasionally pistacia-trees. It was nearly sundown before they reached the oasis of Laghouat.

They drove up to the little hotel just outside the wall of the town.

Having washed and changed his clothes, James felt a great desire to escape from the two Frenchmen. He put on his hat and hurried out. Immediately outside the hotel he was surrounded by swarms of Arab boys jabbering in French. He tried to shoo them off, but four of them followed him everywhere he went. He learnt afterwards to become accustomed to this attention, but at the moment it annoyed him. He wanted to be alone. He crossed the road and climbed up a rocky eminence, followed by his retinue. Clambering over the last boulder he gave a gasp of astonishment. Laghouat is two thousand feet above sea level, and from it the desert slopes gradually down. At first glance it gave him the impression of the sea, an endless quivering ocean glistening in the sun. In the foreground were thousands of stately date-palms, while on his right the little town, dominated by its minaret, was a pleasant jumble of salmon-pink, grey, white, and brown. For the first time since he left the Room he thrilled with a sense of satiety. He sat there for a long while dreaming. The boys chattered to him and among themselves, but he was hardly conscious of them. The sun tipped the horizon, and suddenly he heard a gun fired, a flag fluttered from the top of the minaret, and a diminutive figure in black appeared. Against the

clear blue sky, graduated to pale orange on the horizon, the minaret stood out like a pillar of gold. A rich bell-like voice rang out and seemed to reach the furthermost places in the desert. It was the muezzin calling the faithful to prayer.

James Wilbraham gave a sigh of content.

"I have found it," he thought to himself.

That night he slept badly. He was troubled by the problem of how to keep what he had found. How could he fit into this atmosphere? How could he live? He was at present a foreign guest staying at the only hotel. The town was entirely Arab, its activities almost entirely devoted to the breeding of sheep and cattle. For days he wandered about, listening for signs and portents. The French travellers returned to Algiers. A few other trippers came and went. A week went by. And then one day he met his fate in the person of Giles Duxberry. He was seated on the verandah of the hotel one evening when a tall, angular figure, in a white burnous, came slouching up the path. He seemed to know his way about the hotel, for he made straight for the bell, rang it, and ordered an anisette. Then he retired, washed himself, came back and sat at a table next to James. He poured water into the colourless liquid, drank it in two gulps, and ordered another. When he had consumed four of these insidious drinks, he suddenly said:

"English, aren't you?"

"Yes," said James, with surprise.

"Have a drink?"

It would have been inhuman to refuse, and James also had an anisette. He had never drunk it before, and his single one had a much more potent effect on him than the four did on his chance acquaintance. He tried to be conversational, but it was very difficult. Mr. Duxberry's skin was almost the colour of an Arab's, but his eyes were tired, his manners lethargic. He was like a man utterly bored with every human experience—except perhaps drink. He barked in monosyllables, and explained things in little disconnected sentences.

He was, it appeared, employed by a Lancashire firm in the halfa business. It seemed that some genius had discovered that the long, coarse halfa-grass, which grew in the desert, was excellent material for making paper. It was garnered by the natives, and deposited in bundles in various depôts about the country. Giles Duxberry was in charge of a depôt in a tiny oasis fifteen miles away. He lived there by himself, and the only thing he could find in the job's favour was that once a week he could come into Laghouat and get drunk. He proceeded to get drunk on this occasion, and before the evening was far advanced he was quite incoherent.

Before he had reached this stage, however, he had asked James to come out and see him, and explained where it was. The only way of getting there was on horseback. James felt grateful for his early years spent on a farm. He could ride. The expedition, moreover, carried with it an element of adventure. Perhaps he, too, could get a similar situation.

It took him three days to obtain the loan of a horse, which he eventually did through the intermediary of four people. He felt singularly like a paladin setting out on some holy quest as he left the town behind and cantered across the desert. He had no difficulty in finding his destination. It was a small oasis with the inevitable date-palms, barley, and castor-oil plants, a low, rambling, lime-washed building made of mud and cement, and some half-dozen nomad tents pitched in the sand. He found Duxberry just sitting down to lunch. Without any particular show of warmth the latter said :

"Hullo, you've come then!"

He shouted something in Arabic into the room beyond. The room was plainly but comfortably furnished, and very clean. They had lunch, and were waited on by an incredibly ugly old Ouled Nail woman, with the tattoo mark on her forehead and henna stains on her finger-tips. The food was excellently cooked. James talked and

asked questions, and received monosyllabic grunts in reply. Afterwards they sat outside in the sun and smoked. During the afternoon Arabs kept on arriving with donkeys laden with bundles of halfa-grass. Duxberry checked their operations with idle indifference. There was an amazing sense of peace and space. In an idle moment James thought of the awful Room. What a contrast! He felt envious of this hard-bitten, sunburnt manager. Before he left he put out a feeler. He asked his host whether he knew if there were any more jobs like that going.

Duxberry stared at him.

"What for?" he asked.

"Me."

"You!"

He seemed unable to understand.

"But you've got your fare back to England, haven't you?"

"Yes, but I'd rather live here."

"Rather live out in this God-forsaken place than in England!"

"Much."

"What is there to it?"

"I don't know. It's just the sense of—oh, freedom and space, and sun and air."

The older man regarded him gravely.

"Listen, son," he said; "when you've had as much of it as I have you'll cut all that stuff

out. I ran away from home when I was a boy and worked my passage to South Africa. For thirty years I've beach-combed all over the earth. I've only one ambition."

"What's that?"

"To get back home."

"Good God!"

They looked at each other uncomprehendingly, like men who have reached a mental impasse.

James Wilbraham left soon after and returned to Laghouat. For days he wandered around the desert or sat in the hotel, pondering over the problem of his own life. Certain realizations became clear to him. He was unhappy. He wanted to stay out there. Giles Duxberry was unhappy. He wanted to go back to England. Well, surely the situation could be adjusted. Let Giles go back to the Room, and see how he liked it. Let James take his place.

A few days later Giles arrived for his weekly "drunk." James waited until he had had his fifth anisette, then he said:

"I say, Duxberry, I'd like to make a proposition to you."

"Carry on, son."

"Could you manage to wangle it so that I could take on your job? If you could I would be pleased to give you a hundred pounds to pay your fare back to England."

The beach-comber's eyes distended. He took a deep draught of the milk-coloured liquid.

"A hundred pounds!" he exclaimed. His eyes said: "Well, of all the blanketty, blanketty —idiots!"

They discussed ways and means. Two days later James again rode out to see his friend. Yes, it was decided that it might be wangled. Correspondence passed, resulting in James having to make a trip to Algiers to interview a gentleman who was born in Blackburn. The arrangement was satisfactorily made. He returned to Laghouat full of the joy of life. He spent a week with Giles Duxberry, learning the small technicalities of his undertaking. He began to pick up Arabic words and expressions. And then one day he handed over a hundred good English pounds, and Duxberry counted the notes carefully, pouched them, and held out his hand.

"Good luck to you!" he said.

James felt strangely moved. He could hardly speak. It was not that he had developed any particular affection for his new friend, but that he felt him to be a poignant figure in his destiny. He said:

"Good luck to *you!*"

Nothing more was said. Duxberry mounted his horse, waved a perfunctory farewell, and rode away. James stood there bareheaded, breathing

in the warm air, and absorbing the marvellous sense of repose of the desert.

* * * * *

And so one day Giles Duxberry found himself seated in a horsehair chair that had a tendency to shoot the occupant into the fireplace. He had removed his boots, and was gazing into the fire. Then he looked round and regarded the Room. There was a lovely curly sideboard with mirrors, which reflected the vision of his sunburnt face, a white stand with a pot and a plant, a circular table, two other chairs, a bed. On the wall a pretty pattern and some enchanting pictures—a sacred subject, a boy and a collie dog and a piece of cake, some clever water-colour paintings, King George in his magnificent coronation robes. Civilization !

It was a dream come true—a dream of thirty years. He sighed with happy contentment. He had eighty pounds in cash on him. He had only to stroll out and there were a dozen saloons within a mile, where he could order any drink he liked. There were cinemas and music-halls. There was life passing all the time, strange and amazing things that might happen any moment. He might get a good job, make money, marry some beautiful woman. He gazed fascinated by the Room and murmured :

"Gosh! this is heaven!"

As a man accustomed to live in lonely places he had acquired a habit of talking to himself. He addressed the fire:

"Jeminy! What a fool! what a lunatic! That guy will soon get fed up with it. He'll come bundling back. Anyway, he's not going to take my Room from me. It was a square deal."

NOT DONE

His name was Priest, Albert Hector Priest. When he came to Tibbelsford, the inhabitants regarded him as a foreigner. It took some time to convince them that, as a matter of fact, he had been born and bred in the town. His father had been a corn chandler in Market Square, and he himself was educated at Tibbelsford Grammar School. At the age of seventeen, both his parents having died, an uncle paid his passage out to Canada, and gave him twenty pounds to start him on a career. He was a smart boy, quick at figures, and with a natural grasp for mechanics, and he got on. He became in turn trolley-car conductor, clerk, bar-tender, showman, professional cyclist, dealer in real estate, soft goods salesman, manufacturer's agent, sub-editor of the *Wool Trade Journal,* and his activities carried him all over Canada, California, and the Middle West. Then in the end he invented the celebrated "Priest trouser-stretcher," and made a small fortune.

"The Priest trouser-stretcher" was a most ingenious white-metal contraption, and it was

advertised in numerous newspapers under a headline which said :

"Do not part with your pants. If they trouble you go to Priest and confess." And below came a sub-headline :

"As pants the heart for cooling streams so does Priest pant for yours."

So you see that in addition to his other abilities Albert Hector had a distinct literary flair.

Anyway, at the age of forty-two, so successful had the trouser-stretchers become that Priest sold out his interests, took his wife and two sons for a trip round the world, and came to Tibbelsford with the idea of settling down in the place of his birth. He took a modern Georgian house in the west end of the town, and fitted it up with central heating, electric light, an enormous number of bathrooms, elevators, and endless labour-saving devices. It was fashioned rather on the lines of "The Ideal Home." The Vicar, who had only one bathroom in the rectory—and in that you could never get any hot water—regarded the place with suspicion. It is true that Lord Ingleton was reported to have two bathrooms at Ingleton Towers, but that a man should want not only separate bathrooms for himself, and his wife, and his sons, and his visitors, but that even the servants should have bathrooms of their own, savoured of the immoral.

It was not until the trouser-stretcher magnate

had contributed a useful cheque to church funds that he was forgiven for his lack of conformity.

So obsessed was Albert Hector with the designing and arranging of his ideal home that it was some months before he had time to pay much attention to the town itself. Most of the associates of his youth had vanished, but apart from that, when he had time to look round, he could not but be impressed by the fact that the town had not changed at all. It struck him as amazing that in twenty-four years anything could remain so stationary. There was old Mr. Selden Wright with his huge public-house, "The Love-a-Duck," still dominating the town. All public meetings were still held in his old-fashioned ball-room. The school that he had attended remained untouched. The High Street was exactly the same. There were a few new shops, and a few fronts had been refaced. A little way out two or three dozen new red brick villas had been put up, and one or two motor garages. But that was all. It was not only that there had been little structural change, but mentally the place remained the same. "Good God! they're stagnant," he thought. People were going about doing identically the same things, thinking the same things, that they did a quarter of a century ago. They hadn't moved with the times. They know nothing about modern life. Returning home one evening after a visit to George

Splutter, the barber—where he found to his astonishment that he could not get his boots shined whilst he was being shaved—he said tensely to his wife :

"Maisie, this little burg needs pep, zip, and vim."

And from that moment Albert Hector made up his mind that it was his mission to life to put "pep, zip, and vim" into Tibbelsford. But how to go to work? He discussed the matter at great length with his eldest son, James, who was studying to be an architect and surveyor. The other boy had gone back to Canada. "This place fair beats me," said Priest senior. "There's no git-up-and-git about it. Think of it, a town of this size and there's no social vitality at all. There are just its pubs, and churches, and shops, and market, and old-fashioned houses without any modern conveniences. The folks just go backwards and forwards to their work without any ambition or vision. They've got no kick. They don't know anything. They do the same old things they did when I was a boy—the church bazaar, the flower-show, mothers' meetings, Salvation Army, Girls' Friendly, the stock-breeders' union, and so on. Why, Gosh! there are only two picture-houses in the whole town, and no theatre or decent lecture-hall. I tell you, it wants vision. It wants soul."

And James, who was a dutiful son, and

dependent upon his father for pocket-money, said : "Dad, you've said a mouthful."

"As far as I can find out," continued Mr. Priest, "there are not even any Masons, no lodges, no Elks, no Buffaloes, no Flamingoes, nothing."

"Dad, you've hit it as usual," said the young man. "There's the idea. Why don't you found a lodge and get a move on the social spirit of the community.

Mrs. Priest here joined in the discussion. She was a Canadian woman, of Scotch Presbyterian ancestry. She was flat and thin, and she wore horn-rimmed spectacles. She pointed her index finger at her husband and said :

"That's it, Bert. Uplift!"

Mr. Priest was secretly pleased that his wife and son should both be intelligent enough to see that he was destined to be the man to see this thing through, but he was not going to appear anxious. He hummed and hawed, and talked of the great difficulties. And after thinking over his project for three days he went and called on the vicar, the Reverend Andrew Spiers. To him he endeavoured to explain the idea. To his astonishment he found it extremely difficult to drive into the reverend gentleman's head the precise purport of his mission. The parson's ascetic features gave the impression of incredulity, faint amusement, doubt, bewilderment, and even

disapproval. When his visitor had finished, he said :

"Um—er—yes, Mr. Priest, quayte so, quayte so. But it appears to me that what you are aiming at is allowed for—and, indeed, already arranged for—in our church organizations."

"Ah, you don't quite get me, sir," replied Albert Hector. "This is not a religious organization."

"Why not?" said Mr. Spiers.

"Well, because its—its—er—something else. Everybody doesn't go to church. I want to get hold of the business man, the good fellow. Get 'em together. Get 'em to pull together."

"To what end, Mr. Priest?"

"For the good of the community."

"The Church has that noble ambition."

"Yes, but—business men, you know what I mean. A lot of good fellows get together and they help each other. You know, they cut all the bunk out and come down to brass tacks. Push, go, ambition. That's what this little town wants."

"But why do you come to me, Mr. Priest? Your project appears to me to be more of a business than a religious conception."

"What's wrong with business and religion going hand in hand, sir? Ain't I a good churchman? and my son and wife? Haven't I supported your church?"

"You have been very kind, Mr. Priest, but I—I still don't quayte see the precise significance of this idea of yours. I don't think the parish of Tibbelsford is quayte the place."

He could get nothing more satisfactory out of the Rev. Andrew Spiers, but they parted on friendly enough terms. One of the secrets of his success in life lay in the fact that Albert Hector was a born optimist. He refused to be discouraged by this interview with the rector, or by the bewildered and sceptical attitude of other citizens to whom he tried to explain his idea.

"You've got to allow that they're slow and dull-witted," he told his son, "but when they get the hang of the idea, and see what a boost it's going to give the town, they'll fall in quick enough."

"Of course they will, dad," agreed James. "What we'll be wanting will be a meeting-house. Now what do you say to me getting out plans for a swell lecture-hall? We could put it up in that vacant lot just before you come to the cemetery."

It was not in the nature of Albert Hector to agree with any suggestion of his son or wife directly. He liked to talk about it to such length that in the end he persuaded himself that the idea emanated from himself. The idea of a lecture-hall or public meeting-house had indeed occurred to him, but not the idea that his son should try his prentice hand on it. However, the

boy was getting on. It would be experience for him, and he would be able to get professional advice gratis from the firm to whom he was apprenticed. He eventually agreed.

But it was quite obvious that a move must be got on to the formation of the Lodge before James's new building could come into existence. A few weeks later every householder in the town received this circular :

"*To the Burgesses of Tibbelsford.*

"HAIL AND WELL MET!

"What is England in need of? Why is England lagging behind the modern pushing countries of the world? Where is the pep that made us the dominant power in the Victorian era? Have we discovered an elixir of old age? Some panacea that keeps us just alive and NO MORE? What we want is to get good fellows together and get a boost on the social life of the community. We are stagnant. What we want is movement, impelled by ethical and Christian principles, the square deal, mutual advancement in education and commerce. We've got to give the leg-up, not the stand-by. We've got to drink the strong waters of AMBITION. We've got to have vision, go, belief in ourselves, hustle, COURAGE, co-operation, unity, and foresight.

"To this end will be formed immediately the noble order of the Bisons. Temporary offices

have been secured at 95, High Street. They will be opened on Friday and Saturday next between the hours of 9 a.m. and 6 p.m. Roll up in your hundreds and enroll!

"There is no fee, no charge of any kind.

"The novitiate will be enrolled in the ancient order of Wombats. And by stages of proficiency and experience he will eventuate into the order of Emus, and finally to the most noble order of Bisons.

"(Signed by) the Grand Master of Bisons,
"ALBERT HECTOR PRIEST."

When, with a loud shout of laughter, the landlord showed this circular to old Sam Spearhead in the bar of the Love-a-Duck that same evening, the old man, who was rather short-sighted, said:

"What is it? A circus?"

"No, sir," shouted the landlord. "Unless I'm much mistaken, it's going to be an exhibition of performing animals."

Needless to say, the circular caused endless comment. Mrs. Priest, happening to meet the rector's wife the next day, said:

"Well, what do you think of our project, Mrs. Spiers?"

"It isn't done," replied that lady, and moved away. And that was that.

"What's the fellow's idea?" was the dominant topic.

Now the ironic part of the business was that, as a matter of fact, Mr. Albert Hector Priest was quite sincere in his aims, and no one would give him the credit for it. Opinion was divided into three schools, one that argued that he was a religious fanatic, another that he was just an ordinary fanatic, and the third that he was some kind of swindler. The mere fact that there was no fee or charge of any kind was suspicious. People in Tibbelsford were not accustomed to do or get things for nothing. One rumour got round that the originator was in the pay of the Russian Government, and that he had come there to sow the seeds of revolution and Bolshevism. Another rumour charged him with being a quack faith healer, a purveyor of "the elixir of old age"; while old Sam Waynfleete declared that the whole thing was a practical joke being played by some of the young bloods at Bonnington College.

Some of these rumours reached Mr. Priest, but he went calmly on with his preparations. The offices in the High Street were fitted out with chairs, tables, roll-top desks, files, account books, works of reference, carpets, and curtains. James obtained two days' leave from his duties in order to assist in a clerical capacity, and two lady stenographers were engaged for the two days.

When the Friday dawned, Mr. Priest and his son were up betimes, and arrived at the office at 8.45. The two lady stenographers were there

before nine, and all was bustle and excitement. The father and son both donned green cloaks trimmed with brown fur, curious cockade hats, and round their necks were many chains and orders.

"Now then," said Mr. Priest. "System! that's what we want. System and organization. These offices alone will be an inspiration to these guys. Now, mind none of you forget what I've told you. When the candidate enters, Miss Colegate, you ask him his name and address, and write it down on the card. He then passes on to you, Miss Withers. You take the card, ask him the questions which you've got on the list, and enter the replies in the order records. He then passes into the inner office to James, who will instruct him in the first principles. I shall be there, too, in order that any difficult point may be explained. Hurry up! Hurry up! I hear some coming up the stairs already."

This was an auspicious start, for it was barely the stroke of nine. The two men retired to the inner room, and took up their positions. There was a timid tap on the door, and Miss Colegate called out: "Come in."

The door opened, and seven very small and very grubby children trailed in and stared about.

"Well, what do you children want?" said Miss Colegate.

"Please, miss," said one of the bigger girls, "we've come to see the animals."

"Animals? What animals?"

"Father said you was going to show us some animals."

When the two lady typists at last managed to convince the children that there were no animals they set up a howl in chorus. Priest and son came hurrying into the room, and in the end Mr. Priest had to give all the children a penny each to keep them quiet and get them to go away.

After that the staff was undisturbed for over an hour. The offices were above a chemist's shop, and they could constantly hear the drunken clang of the shop bell.

Mr. Priest looked out of the window. There were the market carts, the van from the imperial stores, errand boys on bicycles, coal-carts, an itinerant knife-grinder, men with push-barrows selling fruit and vegetables.

"All just as it was when I was a boy," he reflected. "They're an immovable mass." Then he thought brightly: "Well, it's for me to be an irresistible force."

His reflections were disturbed by the sound of heavy footsteps coming upstairs, and a tap on the outer office door. Mr. Priest peeped out and saw a likely, well-set-up young mechanic enter. He was carrying a bag of tools. He heard Miss Colegate say brightly: "Well, sir? Have you come to—er——?" And he heard the man reply:

"Can you tell me where the trap-door is, miss? I've come to mend the leak in the roof."

And for the whole of the two days the activities of the staff were accompanied by banging and sawing on the roof above. A little later a forlorn-looking middle-aged man turned up. He wanted to sell a typewriter. It would be idle to record the full list of visitors that the Bison Lodge entertained during the two days. It is only necessary to state that, among others, they consisted of seven unemployed, who came to see if there was a chance of a job, three tradespeople catering for orders, an inspector of police, a man who wanted his account paid for a carpet, and about twenty morbid people who came in to find out what it was all about.

Nevertheless, when the premises closed on Saturday night, Mr. Priest had the satisfaction of knowing that he had enrolled eleven Wombats. It cannot be said that they were ideal representatives of the ancient borough. They were for the most part the rag, tag, and bobtail of the town, drawn thither by the attraction of the term "good fellows." These good fellows reasoned it out in this way:

The term good fellow implied jollification Jollification suggested beer. Of course, there might be beer, and there might not be beer, but beer was worth taking a sporting chance over. Anyway, there was nothing to pay.

Except that they were a shabby lot, Mr. Priest had little chance of judging the character of his Wombats. He could not know, for instance, that two of them had done time, that one was a village idiot, and that four of them were such notorious loafers, and beer swillers, and wife-beaters, that Mr. Selden Wright refused to allow them in his bar.

"It is a beginning," he said. "When these fellows get the hang of it they'll attract others."

He arranged for the first meeting of the Wombats, two weeks ahead, in his own house. He might have arranged it sooner, only that the intervening period had to be devoted to the designing and manufacturing of robes, insignia, and regalia. Meanwhile, the plans and elevations of the lecture-hall had been passed. James had incidentally arranged for a very satisfactory secret commission for himself with a local builder, and the work proceeded with the ponderous deliberation that was characterisitic of the place.

Of the eleven enrolled Wombats only seven turned up on the night, but by active personal canvassing the Priests had secured nine others, so that sixteen attended the inaugural meeting. These included their own gardener and Mr. Cornice, the builder, who was erecting the hall. He was full of enthusiasm for the Noble Order of Bisons. He said:

"Mr. Priest, this is a magnificent idea.

There's no doubt that this is just what the town wants. You are a public benefactor."

The Wombats found themselves committed to wear a curious black cloak, trimmed with grey fur. The Priests were in green and brown. The meeting was held in the drawing-room, and Mr. Priest, as grand master, addressed the company for over an hour. He spoke ecstatically about citizenship, good fellowship, business, God, patriotism, masonry, the Colonies, agriculture, vision, the building trade, trouser-stretchers, love, and ambition. The newly enrolled Wombats listened to him in patches. Their eyes were inclined to wander furtively around the room. When this was all over, would there be beer? or would there not be beer? The unexpressed anxiety in every heart centred round that immortal query: "To be or not to be?"

However, the speech ended at last, and Mr. Priest said briskly:

"Now, brothers, we will join my wife in the dining-room and have some refreshments."

The Wombats tried not to show an indecent haste. They were not yet out of the wood. What sort of refreshments?

On arriving in the dining-room they discovered that their worst fears were well founded. Mrs. Priest was dispensing tea, coffee, thin sandwiches, cakes, and biscuits.

At a meeting held a week later the only

Wombats who put in an appearance were Mr. Cornice, the builder ; a gentleman named Wiles, who had done two years for burglary ; a religious fanatic named Muffle ; and the village idiot.

The only member of the family who accepted this falling off with equanimity was Mrs. Priest, who, the morning after the previous meeting, missed some spoons, a silver jardinière, four brass pots, an ormolu clock, a miniature set with diamond paste, a mackintosh cape, and two umbrellas.

"I'm afraid we haven't yet struck the right bunch," her husband remarked defensively. He refused to believe evil of his fellow-man. There was some curious perverse streak in this community. He couldn't understand it. Why, out in the places where he had been living the folks would have gone crazy over his idea. Was Tibbelsford a frankly immoral, corrupt, self-centred town? But no, the average citizen one met was a decent, slow-going, essentially honest individual. One had only to look at their faces. He took old Frank Goolen, the gardener, to task the morning after this disaster.

"Well, Frank, what did you think of our meeting?"

The old man pulled himself up and leant on his hoe. His clear blue ingenuous eyes regarded his master with a certain diffidence. He was obviously anxious not to be rude.

"Oo, I doan't know," he said, "I doan't take much stock by 'un."

"How do you usually spend your evenings, Frank?"

"Oo, well, I goes 'ome. I 'as a bite and a pow-wow with the missus. P'raps I goes up to Love-a-Duck. I 'as a glass of ale, may be. I likes a glass of ale. I 'as a pow-wow with old Sam, p'haps. We 'as one or two like. That's 'ow it goes."

Mr. Priest saw light. Ale! That's what it was. It was ale that these men wanted and expected. How foolish of him not to have sensed this before. It had never occurred to him. For the second meeting he ordered in two dozen bottles of beer. If the original company had attended, the meeting no doubt would have been a great success. But there were only four, and at sight of these rows of bottles the religious fanatic, Muffle, burst into wild tirade. He said alcohol was the invention of the devil. He had been deceived. This was a house of sin, and so on. He left in a state of righteous indignation. The village idiot had one glass, and insisted on singing "I am a pirate, bold and free." After he had sung it thirteen times he had to be led out. In the meantime Mr. Wiles had quietly consumed seven bottles, and Mr. Cornice three. Wiles got very drunk, and had also to be shown out, so that only the builder was left.

Mr. Cornice was in a pleasant, complaisant mood. He said:

"Look here, Mr. Priest, you leave this to me. I've lived in Tibbelsford all my life. You've lived abroad and got out of touch with the spirit of the place. Your idea's magnificent, and this is very good beer. The trouble is you haven't yet got hold of the right kind of citizen. Now I know them all, all the best ones. I suggest that at the next meeting you get in a barrel of beer, and perhaps a bottle of Johnny Walker for some of the elder men. I'll go round and get hold of the real good fellows, as you call them, and then you explain your project all over again."

"That's a good idea, dad," said James, helping himself to his third bottle of beer. "Mr. Cornice knows everyone."

Mrs. Priest was becoming a little peeved by the whole thing. She ejaculated:

"It seems to me that the people around here are more interested in downpour than in uplift."

The third meeting of the Noble Order of Bisons was an enormous success. Forty-two jolly gentlemen of the agricultural and shopkeeping class attended. Mr. Priest had the success of his life. Every word he uttered was cheered to the echo. His references to citizenship, vision, and the building trade were received with rapturous applause, and when he spoke of trouser-stretchers

and ambition he nearly brought down the house. After the speech they adjourned to the dining-room, and the barrel of beer was tapped and the bottle of whisky opened, and tongues began to wag. There was no doubt that Mr. Priest was a very good fellow, the kind of man Tibbelsford had been waiting for for years. The town was slow and old-fashioned. It wanted bucking up. Here was the very man. Yes, thank you, I'll take another glass. The bottle of whisky seemed to vanish as soon as the cork was taken out, and Mr. Cornice drew the attention of James to the fact, and James told his father. Mr. Priest, flushed with his triumph, ordered three more bottles up from the cellar. By half-past eleven the barrel of beer ran dry, and six bottles of whisky had been consumed. The Noble Order of Bisons was in full working order. But the next day there was an unpleasant reaction. It was brought about by Mrs. Priest. She was very angry. It was not that things had been stolen; nothing was missing except two more umbrellas, a walking-stick, and a pair of field-glasses, but the house was in a disgusting condition. It had been a wet night, and forty-two pairs of muddy boots had tramped all over the two best carpets. Moreover, cigar and cigarette ends and tobacco ash were scattered all over the floors. Beer and whisky had been spilt, and the house reeked like a beer tavern. One of the servants had given

notice, and the cook was in bed with a mysterious bilious attack.

"I won't have another meeting in my house," she said emphatically. "It's perfectly disgusting. If the English people can't do anything without getting drunk, I should think we had better go back to Canada. Besides, think of the expense."

Mr. Priest was also angry, angry with the Wombats, with himself, and with his wife. He tried to explain that the meeting was only of a tentative experimental nature. They were feeling round to get the right people. As for the drink, he certainly shouldn't supply whisky like that again. One of the ideas of the Lodge was to counter that kind of thing, to encourage Christianity and good citizenship. There was no harm in a little beer. When the hall was finished, and the wheat sifted from the chaff, he meant to make the members pay a subscription, and they might run a small beer canteen where they could buy their own drinks. There was no need for his wife to get hysterical.

"Anyway," she snapped finally, "you can just understand. I won't have another meeting here."

This was an exceedingly disconcerting decision, as within the next few days there were one hundred and thirty-seven applications for membership!

Rumour is a peccant jade. Heaven only knows

what she whispered about. It is certain that Mrs. Spiers cut Mrs. Priest dead in the High Street, and in the local paper the following Saturday, under the heading "Things we would like to know," appeared this paragraph:

"Whether the police are watching the activities of a certain Colonial gentleman, who has lately taken a house in the west end, and where orgies are reputed to take place in the name of some quack religion?"

By which it will be seen that Fate and the *Tibbelsford Times* were very unkind to Mr. Priest, who had merely set out with the laudable ambition of introducing "pep, zip, and vim" into the town. He was, however, not yet beaten. If his wife would not have the next meeting at home it must be held elsewhere. He set about searching for a suitable room. The parish school, he was informed, was "not available for such purpose." The lecture-room in connection with St. Mary's Church was quite out of the question, as they were no longer on speaking terms with the Spiers. There was a fairly large room connected with the Baptist Chapel, but it was so unlikely that the pastor would agree to let it that he did not even approach him. There were no other rooms of any size except in a few large private houses, and none of their owners seemed anxious to accommodate him. What was he to do? He had already enrolled his Wombats. The move-

ment was just beginning to catch on. If he waited till the lecture-hall was finished, interest would have waned. It would be a confession of failure. There remained only one solution—the ball-room at the "Love-a-Duck." He had not wanted to go there, as the place was essentially a pub. He was, moreover, a little dubious about Mr. Selden Wright, the proprietor, whom he had never met, and who seemed to exercise an undue influence on the town. He was evidently a man of strong personality, although only a publican, and probably a drunkard. However, there being no alternative, he was forced to apply to him.

In due course the landlord replied. Yes, the room would be available on such and such a date, and the terms would be—well, they seemed rather excessive to Mr. Priest, but it was Hobson's choice.

And so the next meeting of the Bison Lodge took place at the "Love-a-Duck." It was crowded out. Mr. Priest had never addressed such a meeting. There seemed to be a feeling of tense interest. The speaker was so absorbed in his subject that he had no time to give a thought as to whether the interest centred round what he was saying, or whether it was more closely associated with what arrangements he had made with the licensee. Were drinks to be free? or had they to buy them themselves? Mr. Priest was oblivious. He waxed eloquently about good

fellowship, vision—well, you know what he waxed about. About halfway through the landlord came in and stood by the door. He listened for about ten minutes and then slipped quietly out. A few minutes later there came a reverberating noise from the bar. It was the landlord's laugh. It was an irresistible, contagious, rocket of sound that seemed to shake the rafters and to cause the chandeliers to tremble. It made the audience tremble. It was like a sardonic message conveying the fact that there was to be no free beer, and that closing time was drawing near. They looked at each other apprehensively, and those nearest the door began to slip out. The risk was too great. When the address was over, a third of the audience had disappeared.

So consumed was he with his oratory that Mr. Priest hardly noticed this. Directly it was over Mr. Cornice, and some of his immediate pals, came up and smothered him with congratulations.

"You've fairly got them now, sir," said Mr. Cornice, "you'll revolutionize the town."

"By Jove, sir, it was magnificent!" echoed Mr. Cornice's cabinet-maker's foreman, who was wearing his Sunday clothes for the occasion. Others buzzed around him, and Mr. Priest went home feeling that he could tell his wife with triumph that it was much more satisfactory having the meetings at the "Love-a-Duck" than at home.

The triumph, however, was not of long duration. For at the next meeting, although the great hostel itself seemed very crowded, very few troubled to come into the meeting. James, who was acting as secretary, had to read out a long list of resignations among the Wombats. During the meeting, moreover, there was a good deal of hilarity, not only outside in the bars and corridors, but in the room itself. Some of the cheers had a note of irony.

When it was over, Mr. Cornice said :

"We haven't quite got the right crowd yet. We must wait till the lecture-hall is finished—get our own atmosphere like."

It was another two months before the lecture-hall was ready. In the meantime Mr. Priest held a few private meetings, and did a deal of active canvassing on his own.

"I realize," he explained philosophically to his wife and son, "that I have acquired something which they find difficult to get. They, on the other hand, have a substratum of conservatism I have forgotten. I didn't believe it still existed. You can change an individual, but it's darn difficult to change a community. It isn't only beer which is the pivot of their lives. There's a certain kind of queer stickiness and faith in what's always been done, being good enough for 'em. It'll take a lot of shifting."

The lecture-hall was a most refined structure

in red brick and stucco. It was panelled inside in beetroot-coloured mahogany with a blue frieze. It had a committee-room, a reading-room, a secretary's room, lavatories, and a bar. Now, concerning this bar there was a good deal of trouble. Mr. Priest had decided that if the Wombats demanded beer they should pay for it themselves. There should be a Lodge canteen. It was not till it was nearly completed that Mr. Cornice remarked one day: "I suppose, sir, you have applied for a licence?"

Mr. Priest hadn't. It didn't occur to him that there would be any difficulty over that. He got his lawyer to work, and that gentleman reported that application had to be made to the Town Clerk, who would report the matter to the local licensing magistrate, who, in the course of time, would refer to the licensing committee, who at some remote date would decide that it was not desirable at that time to grant any further licenses for the sale of intoxicating liquor.

"Of course," Mr. Cornice pointed out, "there's nothing against you, as a proprietor, supplying any drink you like, so long as it's not charged for."

The whole attitude of the town seemed to be a conspiracy to force him to supply beer to the inhabitants free. Beer seemed to be the open sesame to every local activity. He couldn't understand it. He was angry—damned if he would buy

beer for these bone-headed guys. He offered uplift and they demanded beer, and the church and the schools and the civil authorities wouldn't help him.

"Never mind," he said, "we'll start out with a swell do. We'll make 'em sit up. There'll be only soft drinks, but we'll give 'em such an entertainment as they've never had in this little burg before. None of your cheap stuff, but a real elevating evening."

The following week the whole town was placarded with flaming posters:

THE BISON LODGE.

GRAND OPENING OF NEW LECTURE HALL,
Corner of Boltington Road,
SATURDAY EVENING NEXT, THE 27TH, AT 8.30. P.M.

On this occasion there will be, in addition to an address by the GRAND MASTER,

A LANTERN LECTURE ON THE AUSTRIAN ALPS BY PROFESSOR BILDERS BRAINTREE.

Special Engagement of the following Distinguished Artistes from London:

HERR HERMANN SCHAUCK.	(In German lieder)
SIGNOR PIZZECATO.	(In Italian opera)
MADAME CAVERINA BOMBADA.	(In arias from Puccini and Bizet)

Members of the Lodge are invited to bring one guest. Non-members charge, 2s., including light refreshments.

The hall was constructed to hold four hundred and fifty people. When the Grand Master got up to address the company there were thirty-seven people present. Before the last item was reached there were fifty-eight, of whom four had paid. The audience seemed to consist mostly of women and young children, who made a bee line for the cakes and lemonade directly it was over.

Mr. Priest knew then that the game was up. He was flogging a dead horse. You couldn't drive git-up-and-git into a town which regarded this rich fare so perfunctorily.

"The point is, dad," said James, when they got home, "I don't believe Tibbelsford *wants* uplift."

"It isn't a question of wanting. It's a question of understanding," said Mr. Priest, who didn't like anyone else, least of all his family, to make conclusions. "One might just as well expect hyænas to understand double-entry."

He passed a restless and disturbed night. In the morning he was strolling in the garden admiring the rose-shoots. He saw Mr. Mildrew drive up in his little dog-cart, get out, and walk briskly up the path to the tradesman's entrance. Mr. Mildrew was notoriously the best and most respectable grocer in the town. He was a dapper little man, with a neat black moustache. For seventeen years he had been in the habit of driving round the neighbourhood on his customers

and calling for orders. His theory was that he liked to come in touch with them personally, to find out their exact requirements, and to avoid mistakes and misunderstandings.

"Now, that's the kind of feller," reflected Mr. Priest. He went up to him and called out: "Hi, Mildrew!"

"Good-morning, sir," said the grocer.

"Now you're the kind of feller who knows things. You've heard all about my move here, you know, the Bisons and that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Now why, for one, didn't you come to my show last night?"

The grocer cleared his throat.

"There were a lot of things on in the town last night, sir."

"A lot of things on in the town! What kind of things?"

"Well, sir, for one thing there was the football club general meeting. There was the pig-breeders' dinner, a discussion at the church school about the revision of the Prayer-Book, the committee meeting to discuss the presentation to Farmer Williams for saving that boy's life in the Tibbel, the fly-fisher's smoking concert, and several others."

"My! But—Gosh! where did all these things happen?"

"Some at the church schools, but mostly in the 'Love-a-Duck,' sir."

"And what were you at?"

"Oh, I had, of course, to go to the Masonic dinner. That was in the ball-room at the 'Love-a-Duck'."

"What?"

"The Masonic dinner."

"Masonic? I've lived here all this time and I've never heard that there was such a thing as a Mason in the town."

"No, sir, one often doesn't hear about—the Masons. They don't talk much."

"They don't! Why not? Is there anything to be ashamed of?"

"Oh no, sir. It's just that we don't do it."

"But, Golly! this beats me. Masons, eh? There am I a member of the Flamingoes, the Elks, the Beavers; we're proud of our Lodges. We don't mind letting folks know."

"No, sir? Well, I suppose it's just a different way of looking at things."

"And I suppose you got drunk?"

"Oh no, sir. Some of the gentlemen drank beer. There was no case of excess. I myself am a teetotaller."

"And who belongs to the darn thing?"

"Most of the best people, if I may say so, sir. I am not, of course, allowed to divulge names."

"Well, I'm jiggered!"

"By the way, sir, I called on Mr. Selden Wright this morning. He asked me to give you a message. He said that if at any time you wanted to let that lecture-hall, he is looking out for a garage, and would be pleased to make you an offer."

Mr. Priest was furious.

"Well, of all the darned insolence! Listen, Mildrew, I came back to this God-forsaken little town with the idea of helping, boosting, getting a move on things. And nobody helps me, nobody understands me, nobody believes in me. How do you account for it?"

"I don't know, sir. I suppose it's just a different way of doing things. The people here like what they're used to. Anyway—there it is."

He tapped his book, gazed reflectively at the large red house, and then added brightly:

"By the way, sir, are there any orders for groceries this morning?"

THE OLD LADY WITH THE TWO UMBRELLAS

PARIS can be an exceedingly dull city. One has only to miss a keenly anticipated appointment with a friend, to catch a cold in the head, to be disappointed in some love affair, to realize that the cold grey waters of the Seine are the only really inviting thing about it. One is down in the depths. Certainly these moods are apt to be transitory. One burst of sunshine, and lo! the cold in the head is forgotten, the friend has been waiting all the time, the girl may turn up. I forget which of these misfortunes had assailed me, but I know that I was in a very bad humour, sitting alone outside a little café in Etoile. Imagine my delight, then, when who should amble along the boulevard, and proceed to seek a table near me, but my old friend Tolozan. I had not seen him since his retirement from the police intelligence department at Bordeaux, upon a modest but well-merited pension. He held out his hand to me and smiled in that courtly and engaging manner which was characteristic of him.

One of the secrets of his successful career had been that manner of inspiring immediate confidence. One went on from the point where one last left off, however long an interval may have intervened. He forgot nothing. All one's own opinions and affections appeared to be stored away carefully in his memory. The humdrum details of my particular trouble on this occasion evoked from him a profound concern. (Looking back on it I think it must have been a girl; no cold in the head would have called forth such charming sympathy.)

My affairs dismissed, he told me that he was living at Colombes with his wife and daughter. He had a small villa and an acre of garden, which occupied most of his time. He spoke lovingly of his roses and gentians, his runner beans and leeks, and vegetable marrows. He hoped I would pay him a visit. He had come to Paris to buy seeds.

I was vaguely amused at my friend's enthusiasm. I could not help being impressed by the contrast of these placid interests compared with the turbulent incidents of his career spent amongst criminals and courtesans. At the same time, I could not help rejoicing that the perils and dangers of his life were passed, and that he had now reached this calm haven, where he could enjoy a full measure of repose, and indulge in those pleasant philosophical recreations and theories, which always attracted him so.

Moreover, I had been anxious to meet him ever since his retirement. I felt convinced that stored away in the archives of his memory must be many interesting facts and stories which the etiquette of the service would have prevented him from divulging while in harness. Over our coffee I boldly insinuated that this might be the case. He smiled deprecatingly and shrugged his shoulders. He was not one of those old chaps who like to hold youth spellbound by a recapitulation of their remarkable deeds and exploits. He was no Tartarian of Tarascon. It was indeed difficult to get him to talk about himself in a subjective sense at all. If a discussion arose, he would point some little theory with a leaf or two taken from the record of his own experiences, but as for telling a tale in the accepted sense, well, he simply couldn't see the sense of it. I dug out of him the story of the Old Lady with the Two Umbrellas. Being a writer, and therefore a person with an elastic conscience, I have no hesitation in repeating it. But I'm glad I am to do it in a foreign language and in a foreign country, for I feel that Tolozan would not approve. He told me once that the only fiction he had ever read was "Monte Cristo," and he thought it a poor book, pointless and improbable. He used to study Comte, Montaigne, and seed catalogues.

I should never have got these facts out of him

at all, I believe, if it had not happened to commence raining whilst we were sitting outside the café. We were under an awning and the procession of people passing by, holding up umbrellas, reminded him of the salient fact, for he turned to me and said abruptly :

"What would you think of anyone who always carried two umbrellas?"

The question was so surprising that I had nothing to reply. Two umbrellas? He continued meditatively :

"I knew a woman who did this."

I begged him to enlighten me upon the details of this unusual fact, and by many questionings and promptings I got the story out of him.

It happened after he had left the service. It appears that for a year after his retirement he and his wife and daughter continued to live in Bordeaux. They only came to Paris ultimately because it was decided that the daughter should attend the conservatoire of music. On retiring, his portfolio and the cases he had in hand were given over to a younger man, named Freycinet. He was a young man for the position, and a protégé and friend of Tolozan's. He frequently visited the family at their flat in the Rue Judaique. One evening towards the end of the summer—it was the summer following the Armistice—Freycinet came to him in a great state of consternation. He was obviously bewildered and

distressed. Tolozan took him into his little den and begged him to confide his trouble.

"I'm likely to lose my position," he kept repeating.

"Well, old man, tell me all about it. Perhaps I can be of service," said Tolozan.

"It's like this," spluttered Freycinet. "Two months ago we received information from the prefecture that gold was leaking out of the country over the Spanish border. I was sent down to Irun to take charge of the matter. I did the usual thing, examined all luggage, searched promiscuous people, arrested a few suspicious characters, doubled the sentries at vital points on the border, but nothing came of it. We could find no trace of the leaking gold. For three weeks I was up night and day doing everything I could think. Then a stern note came from headquarters. The gold was still going through. Something more must be done. These Treasury people have wonderfully sensitive ways of finding out. They believed it went through to Bilbao ; a steady stream of golden louis. I became more drastic. For three days running I had every passenger on every train thoroughly searched, all the luggage thoroughly sifted. I even probed amongst the coal on the engines. I searched the guards and porters and engine-drivers. The Government sent naval packets to patrol the Bidassoa, a destroyer to watch off Hendaye, and

two others to cover the coast between there and Bordeaux. Not a boat put out to sea without being searched. We never found a coin. A fortnight later the prefect of the police sent for me. He was furious. He said that he regretted to say that he held me responsible. The Government were of opinion that the gold was going through by land, and they were demanding a scapegoat. You see the position I'm in, old man. That was only a week ago, and I've found nothing."

Tolozan looked very grave. He pulled at his thin grey imperial and muttered:

"Smuggling gold out of the country is a penal offence. A man or woman who does that is a traitor to France."

He was very indignant. Tolozan had a criminal code of his own. There were some crimes of which he was surprisingly tolerant. In his opinion the worst crimes were the unpatriotic ones. He would show no mercy to a traitor. Over this affair of Freycinet he wished to make his position clear. He had retired, and he had no intention of deliberately interfering. If he helped his old colleague with his advice, he must understand that he only did so out of his affection for him and for the safety of France. His name was not to be made use of, neither would he take any active part. He would merely observe, and if any illumination came to him he would pass it

on to Freycinet to act upon. He would accompany him to the frontier, paying his own expenses.

Freycinet was naturally delighted at his friend's offer, and thanked him profusely. On their way to the station he told him of one unusual incident in the case.

"Naturally," he said, "I have been on the lookout for suspicious characters, and also for people who pass backwards and forwards frequently. Several of the latter I have examined and cross-examined, and gone to the trouble of certifying their statements. For the most part, they are quite innocuous, little traders, commercials, and genuine business people, but there is one old woman who mystifies me. She goes into Spain about twice a week and returns the next day. She always carries two umbrellas and no other luggage at all. The second time she went through I had her up. The woman officials searched her. I searched the umbrellas. There was nothing, nothing at all. She is patently an old crank of some sort. When I asked her why she carried two umbrellas she replied that one was for fair weather and the other for foul. The next time she gave some other reason, quite trivial and absurd. She is quite a character. She attracts a lot of attention in the Customs, talks loudly to everyone, cheeks the officers. They all know her, and are rather amused. They

say, 'Hullo, here comes Madame Fair and Foul!'"

"Have you followed up her case more closely?" asked Tolozan.

"No. As we know that she neither takes gold out of the country nor brings anything in, it hardly seems worth while. She says her name is Madame Ponsolle. She lives in Bayonne and goes across to visit her sick daughter in San Sebastian. She stays the night with the daughter and returns."

"Are the umbrellas always the same?"

"No, since you mention it, they are not. Sometimes she carries an old blue one with a black-and-white handle; sometimes a black one with a brown handle. I have not made a careful note, but it has struck me that the umbrellas are not always the same. What were you thinking?"

"They may be a sign. A message may be conveyed by such means."

"Yes—but, I don't see how a message could affect the smuggling of gold."

"It might be worth while to follow her. If the umbrellas were always the same, I agree we could dismiss her as a crank, but the fact that they are different——"

"Very good. I'll have her followed if she comes through again."

The two friends arrived at Irun the same afternoon, and Freycinet made arrangements to have

all the passengers on the evening express examined. None of his subordinates had anything to report. The old lady with the two umbrellas had not been through again. Tolozan took up his position on the platform, the figure of an indolent, rather bored commercial traveller, with a leather attaché case, and a small pile of Parisian newspapers tucked under his arm. When the train came in, and the passengers were turned out, and herded into the Custom House, he also drifted thither. The noise was deafening—sleepy passengers grumbling at the disturbance, porters struggling with bags and trunks, everyone—including the inspectors—irritable and peevish. Tolozan was pushed hither and thither. Suddenly above the din he heard a shrill voice calling out :

"Oh, you devils ! All this again, you miserable toads. As though a lady of my irreproachable character can't carry an umbrella without having all these magpies pecking at her. Ah, there he is ! There's a pretty apple-cheeked young man. Rénè ! I'm sure his name is Rénè. Come, come along. Hurry, little one. Much as we love you, we can't spend the night here."

Tolozan heard one of the porters mutter : "There she is again. There's old Madame Fair and Foul."

She was waving her umbrellas threateningly, the centre of an astonished group. Even the

disgruntled passengers could not restrain a smile, and the officials shrugged their shoulders helplessly. She was rather a tall woman with a black shawl round her head and a shabby black frock. The shawl partly concealed her face. A mop of white hair dangled down, almost covering her eyes.

"Look at that extraordinary old woman," people were exclaiming. "All her luggage seems to consist of two umbrellas."

While they were indulging in this reflection, an official came in, and in an enormous voice bellowed out :

"All women to the right. All men to the left."

A search ! Freycinet's work. Grumbles turned into curses, irritation into violent abuse. Scandalous ! What was the meaning of it all ? As though it wasn't bad enough to go through the Customs ! Where was liberty, equality, fraternity ? What were these busybodies thinking of ? Sweating and groaning, the people poured into the adjoining rooms and quickly forgot all about the old woman with the umbrellas. Ten minutes later Tolozan drifted into a little office where Freycinet sat in state. Various officials were bustling in and out of the room.

"Well, old man ?" he said, on observing Tolozan.

"I should like to examine the old lady's umbrellas."

"Certainly."

In a few minutes the umbrellas were brought. There was nothing about them to arouse the slightest suspicion except that one, with a jade green handle, looked more expensive than the costume of the old lady seemed to justify. The other was shabby enough, with a handle of brown wood. Tolozan naturally examined the frames carefully to see if there was any patent spring, or any possibility of gold being secreted. But he quickly realized that such an eventuality was quite out of the case. There was no spring, the stems were much too thin, and the green one was made of steel.

"Would you like to question her?" said Freycinet.

"No," replied Tolozan. "Have you detailed anyone to follow her?"

"Not yet."

"In that case it would amuse me to follow her myself, if you have no objection."

"My dear fellow, I should be delighted, if you really think—if you don't think it will be wasting your time."

"An idea occurred to me whilst I was watching the crowd in the Custom House. I would rather not say anything about it. I may be on

the wrong track. But twenty-four hours' delay won't make such a grave difference."

"Very good. The Spanish train leaves in a quarter of an hour."

It is characteristic of Tolozan that he said very little about his trip over the border. His attitude all through was that he was a helper, not an actor, in this little drama. He wanted Freycinet to find things out for himself. He was merely assisting, suggesting. He did not return the next day. Indeed, he did not return for over a week ; but on the third day Freycinet received a mysterious and cryptic message from him. It was scribbled across a half sheet of notepaper like a formula from a school text, and was initialled "T." It ran as follows :

"If one's attention is arrested by an old woman with two umbrellas one is apt to overlook a young man with a walking-stick."

Whatever did he mean ? A young man with a walking-stick ? Had Tolozan seen or heard anything ? Why didn't he return ? Freycinet continued his worrying tactics at the frontier town. He was becoming unpopular among his subordinates, who were getting tired of being nagged and sworn at by weary travellers. The old lady with the two umbrellas had returned as usual the next day and gone back to Bayonne.

"When he comes back I suppose I must keep my eyes skinned for a young man with a walking-

stick,'' thought Freycinet, who held his old chief in almost reverential awe. Truly enough, the day after receiving the message, Madame Ponsolle appeared again. Freycinet followed her into the Custom House. There she was as garrulous and noisy as ever. Freycinet glanced around. There was the same crowd as usual—Basque peasants, clerks, shopkeepers, commercial travellers, a few English and American tourists. A young man with a walking-stick? Well, of course, there were several. Many of the men were carrying walking-sticks. However, he felt bound to act upon his friend's hint, so he went up to one young man who was standing close behind the old lady, and tapped him on the shoulder.

''Will you please come with me,'' he said.

The young man looked scared, but followed him quickly enough. In the office he said:

''Please show me your papers.''

Maxim Quinson, aged 43, traveller in machine tools to Messrs. Charbonel et Cie, engineers, of Bordeaux, visiting firms in San Sebastian, Bilbao. Yes, everything in order.

''Open your valise and remove your overcoat.''

The young man did as he was ordered.

In the valise were a few catalogues and papers, clean linen, boots, and night attire. Nothing of any consequence. Neither did the contents of his clothing reveal anything more interesting.

"This is ridiculous," thought Freycinet, "if I've got to arrest every man who carries a walking-stick."

The little traveller was sent on his journey.

A few days later Tolozan returned.

"Has the old lady with the two umbrellas been through again?" was the first question he asked.

"No," replied Freycinet. "But I should think she is about due. Have you anything to report, Tolozan?"

Tolozan looked relieved, and slightly mysterious. He plucked at his beard thoughtfully.

"I would rather wait till after the evening train has been in before I express any opinion. In the meantime, let us see whether Madame Delarme can give us an omelette and a ragout. That Spanish food always nauseates me." Tolozan was in gay humour over their meal, and refused to discuss the affair of smuggled gold.

When the evening train came in, however, they both were on the watch, and mingling with the crowd in the Custom House.

"As I thought," muttered Tolozan. The old lady with the two umbrellas was as noisy and active as ever. Freycinet looked eagerly to see if the young man with the walking-stick was accompanying her. He was not. But, of course, there were other men with walking-sticks struggling and gesticulating near the barrier.

"As I thought," again muttered Tolozan.

Freycinet glanced quickly at his friend. He was regarding a pale middle-aged man standing behind the old lady.

"That's not the man who accompanied her the other day," whispered Freycinet.

"No? Does it occur to you that anything else is similar?"

"No-o, I can't say it does. Does it occur to you?"

"Only this—although it's not the same man, it's the same walking-stick."

"Good God!"

"Wait a minute, Freycinet! Isn't it more important for the Government to know where the gold comes from rather than where it goes to? Think. As a matter of fact, I believe I know where it goes to."

"You know where it goes to! You make me feel like a baby, Tolozan. Do you mean to say that the gold is actually in that stick? And I had it in my hands the other day!"

"I have every reason to believe that it is. But there is another point. I doubt whether the man who is carrying it knows what he is carrying. There's only one person in this crowd who knows and that's the old woman with the two umbrellas —the decoy."

Freycinet braced himself up. He knew that his friend expected him to act, that he was leaving

it to him. He walked quickly out of the Custom House. In a few minutes an official entered and announced that everyone was to be searched again. He asked Tolozan to accompany him to his little office. "I'm simply doing this so that the old lady shan't know we have found out," he said to Tolozan, with the glance of a terrier seeking approval from his master. In a few minutes the man with the walking-stick was brought in.

"Your papers, please, and then open your bag and remove your coat," said Freycinet; and then casually: "What a very handsome cane! Allow me!"

He took the cane and examined it. It certainly was handsome. It was made of some very hard South American wood—possibily snake wood. It had a silver knob and a broad silver band a few inches from the top. It was uncommonly heavy. Freycinet gave the knob several twists, but nothing happened. Then he tried the silver band. At the third attempt it moved. Exerting great pressure, he succeeded in making it revolve.

"I observe you carry a sword-stick, Monsieur Grimaux," he remarked.

The man looked very agitated. He was standing in his shirt-sleeves. He mumbled:

"It doesn't belong to me, inspector. I borrowed it."

"Ah! Someone is very trusting. What is all this?"

The top of the stick had come off. Freycinet was pouring out on the deal office table a stream of gold louis pieces !

The expression on the man's face was a strange mixture of amazement and fear. He burst into a sob.

"I know nothing about it, inspector. I know nothing about it."

"You know that smuggling gold over the frontier is a penal offence ?"

"Yes, I've heard so, monsieur, but I know nothing about it. I didn't know the cane had gold concealed in it. Someone asked me to bring it. I've a wife and three children, monsieur. I'm a poor man. I've never done anything dishonest. I swear, inspector, I know nothing about it."

"Come, come, pull yourself together. We want to get at the truth. It will pay you to be quite candid. If you lie you will go to prison. If you speak the exact truth, we may let you go. Tell us exactly how you came by this."

The man was a poor specimen. His teeth were chattering. He blurted out :

"They threatened to kill me if I blabbed."

"Go on. Tell us the exact story."

"I'm a traveller in hosiery," he stammered. "I bought my ticket for Bilbao at the ticket-office in Bayonne, where I come from. Just after I had got it a lady comes up to me and says : 'Excuse me, monsieur ; I heard you say you were

going to Bilbao. I wonder whether you would do me a favour?' 'Charmed, madamoiselle,' I replied. She handed me the walking-stick and said, 'Will you take this stick to my husband? He values it very much. He will give you two hundred francs for your kindness.' I said I was delighted. I am a poor man, and I have three children, one ailing. She said, 'Wait two minutes and I'll get you the address.' She disappeared in the crowd. A few minutes later an individual came up to me that I didn't like the look of at all. He looked like a bull-fighter. He said: 'The lady can't come back, but it's all right. Your instructions are this—you've to hang on to that cane like grim death and never let it out of your sight. On the platform you'll see an old woman with two umbrellas. You go up to her and let her see you've got the stick, but you don't speak to her. You keep close to her all the way to Bilbao, especially in the Customs. The next morning after you get to Bilbao, you walk along the Calle Major at twelve-fifteen. Just before you come to San Stefano you'll meet a man with a blue rosette in his button-hole. You hand him the stick, and he'll give you an envelope containing two hundred francs. That's all you have to do. It's money easily made. Only don't let there be any nonsense.' He held his face close to mine and said in a horrible voice: 'If you footle the little arrange-

ment you'll get a knife between your ribs.' And there it is, Monsieur Inspector. I've footled it. I'm in danger. Oh! I wish I'd never seen the stick."

Freycinet counted out the gold pieces. There were exactly two hundred and seventy-eight. They fitted perfectly into the hollow of the stick, which had obviously been made for them. He deliberately poured them all back into the stick and snapped the top to. Then, to the amazement of the traveller in hosiery, he handed it back to him and said:

"We don't want you to be killed, Monsieur Grimaux; continue your journey and carry out your instructions, and not a word of this to anyone."

When this dazed individual had managed to escape from the room, Freycinet turned to Tolozan and said:

"I see your point. It is more necessary to find out where this gold comes from than where it goes to."

He rang a bell and a subordinate appeared.

"Tardieu," he said, "follow that man who has just gone out of the bureau with a kit-bag and walking-stick. He is going to Bilbao. But I want you to follow the stick and not the man. When he gives it up, follow the person he has given it to, and come back and report as soon as possible."

When the sub-inspector had gone, Tolozan nodded sagely.

There was nothing more to do that night, so the friends adjourned to a local café, and Tolozan was quite eloquent upon the new theories of Professor Einstein, the influence of Comte upon modern theological reactions, and the splendour of rum omelettes as supplied by the stepmother of one of his daughter's school friends. Freycinet was sometimes a little abstracted during these dissertations. He could not get his mind off the case in hand. While Tolozan was talking about relativity, he was thinking :

"How am I going to get hold of the real culprits? The old lady with the two umbrellas is not going to run undue risks. A clever idea to get all this smuggling done for you by innocent people. Who is he? Who gets hold of the gold in the first place? Where does it go to? It's all so disconnected. Whoever I arrest will say they know nothing about it. There must be some big organization at the back somewhere. Who is it? What does Tolozan think? Damn Einstein!"

Three days later Tardieu returned. This was his story. He had followed the traveller in hosiery to Bilbao. The man had gone to a quiet hotel, where Tardieu also secured a room. He had gone to bed early and taken the walking-stick with him. The next morning he had taken it

out. He appeared very agitated. He sat about on the boulevards, and kept on looking at his watch. At twelve o'clock he had walked quickly to the Calle Major. There he had met a man with a blue rosette in his buttonhole. He handed the cane over to him, and received an envelope in exchange. Tardieu followed the man with the blue rosette. He entered a restaurant and ordered lunch. In a few minutes another man entered and joined him at table. They talked quietly and were quick over their lunch. When it was finished they parted, but Tardieu observed that in the process of departure they had exchanged walking-sticks. He followed the second man, who hailed a cab. Tardieu also got a cab and bade the driver follow. They drove up to the commercial centre of the town. The man got out and entered a building divided up into various business offices. He went up on the first floor and entered a room labelled "Private." It was part of a suite of rooms belonging to a big banking concern connected with one of the South American republics. Tolozan would not tell the name of this republic, but I gathered that it was a country whose Government had never been very friendly to France.

Anyhow, in these offices Tardieu lost sight of the walking-stick. The individual he had tracked returned without it in about twenty minutes' time and drove away. The detective watched the

building for twenty-four hours, and though clerks and officials were coming and going all the time no one came out with the walking-stick. He then thought it advisable to report to his chief as he had been instructed to do so as soon as possible.

"H'm," thought Freycinet. "I've bungled it again. We have lost sight of the stick. To find it on its way back to Paris will be like looking for a needle in a haystack."

However, there was nothing to do but to lie in wait for it at Irun station and trust to luck. He detailed two inspectors to go through each train as it came through, and to search for the stick in most unlikely places. He and Tardieu took up positions in the Custom House. Tolozan wandered languidly hither and thither. On the second day, on the morning train the old lady with the two umbrellas appeared, and the staff doubled their exertions. She seemed less talkative than usual, and was attracting little attention. Neither did there appear to be anyone dancing attendance upon her. Several walking-sticks appeared in the Custom House, but not one that resembled the all-important one to the slightest degree. Freycinet was beginning to feel discouraged. He felt that his whole career depended upon his success over this search. To fail would be a terrible misfortune, but to fail under the eye of Tolozan, and helped by his advice, would make

the position doubly bitter. He rushed hither and thither like a terrier on a rabbit warren. It irritated him at one moment to observe Tolozan idly chatting with a tall angular English clergyman, a ridiculous foreign tourist in a mackintosh, and carrying the inevitable bag of golf-clubs. As he passed he heard Tolozan droning about "mashies" and "niblicks." Why wasn't he helping in the hunt? What had he come from Bordeaux for? In five minutes' time the express would be leaving and another opportunity lost. Five minutes, four minutes, three minutes—someone tapped him on the shoulder. It was Tolozan. Tolozan, with a slight flush of excitement tinging his normal lethargy. He nodded in the direction of the train.

"In the third coach," he whispered. "Bound for Paris."

"What is that?"

"The English curé, the golf player."

"What about him?"

"He's got the walking-stick in his golf-bag."

A horn was blowing, warning people of the departure of the train."

"En voiture! En voiture!"

Freycinet leaped upon that train like a cat springing at a bird. It was very crowded, and he had to stand in the corridor. He had to stand in the corridor nearly all the way to Paris, but he felt that the discomfort was thoroughly justified.

In a corner seat lolled the angular English clergyman, with his golf-clubs in a bag on the rack above him. Freycinet had plenty of time to consider how to act. He wandered about the corridor and smoked until lunch was served in the dining-car. As he expected, the clergyman was one of the first to make a bee-line for that abode of material refreshment. When he had gone, Freycinet slipped into his seat. He was glad of the rest. He waited a few minutes; then he reached up and pulled things about on the rack, as though searching for something. The action was sufficient to enable him to verify Tolozan's statement. There was the walking-stick, buried amongst mashies and niblicks and drivers. He smiled contentedly and read a newspaper. At the end of an hour the reverend gentleman returned. Freycinet jumped up and said in English:

"Pardon, sir. I had not the good fortune to secure a seat, so I took advantage of your absence to take a little rest."

"Quayte! Quayte! Don't let me disturb you."

"Ah, no, monsieur. I should not think of usurping—excuse me."

The little scrimmage in manners was sufficient to inaugurate a formal acquaintanceship. They talked about the weather, and the luncheon service

on the train, and the condition of the greens on the San Sebastian golf-course. Then Freycinet went in to lunch himself. He had no desire to be more intimate with the clergyman than the exigencies of the case demanded. He spoke to him once or twice on the journey to Paris, but it was not until the train was slackening up on its last run through that long tunnel into the Gare Quai d'Orsay that Freycinet suddenly whispered :

" Excuse me, monsieur. In your golf-bag you have a walking-stick. Will you be good enough to tell me how you came by it ?"

The clergyman looked surprised, hesitated, and said blushingly :

" Ha—H'm—yes. Quayte. Quayte so. Rather peculiah affair. Man at San Sebastian station—ah—came up to me and asked me if I would object to taking it to Paris. Some other—ah—um—fellow at the Quai d'Orsay with an ambah tie-pin in a blue tie would meet me and ask for it—very old and—ah—valuable stick—heirloom—ha—h'm—yes."

The man was at the station all right, and the clergyman departed.

(If the Reverend Peter Dorking, of Instill Rectory, near Dewsbury, should ever read these lines, let him stand up and take note that he was very nearly involved in a very serious case.

Moreover, he might just as well have had the courage to speak the truth. There was nothing to be ashamed of in the fact that it was a *lady* who gave him the stick and not a man !)

In any case, with the advent of the man with the "ambah" tie-pin, Freycinet's interest in the clergyman vanished. He became very alert. As I said before, I had to dig all these details out of Tolozan. He contended that the case was the making of Freycinet, and that he showed great acumen and energy over it. Of course, he took no credit for any of it to himself. However that may be, it is certain that Freycinet is now held in high esteem by the Police Intelligence Headquarters in Paris, as well as by certain members of the Government. The disappointing thing is that I am pledged in secrecy to Tolozan not to reveal a certain name. When he came to it he seemed so reluctant to mention it that he eventually wrote it down on the back of an envelope and then tore it into little pieces with an angry gesture. The sight of that name made me gasp.

It appears that the same procedure was followed as that which had taken place in Bilbao, when Tardieu followed up the delivery of the walking-stick. The man with the amber tie-pin drove to a small café in the Rue de la Boëtie. There he was joined by a man and a girl. They

had two drinks together, and then the man and the girl departed, and the walking-stick again changed hands. Freycinet nearly missed them, owing to the difficulty of picking up a taxi, but he got one just as they were nearly out of sight. A Parisian taxi-driver requires no encouragement to drive like a madman, because that is his normal method. The cabs raced up the Champs Elysees and turned to the left. They drove down the Avenue Malakof, and then the front cab began to pull up.

Freycinet said that when he observed the house where the cab stopped he felt his heart beating violently. He knew the gorgeous Renaissance edifice quite well by sight. It belonged to one of the wealthiest and most influential men in Paris, a member of the Government, and a high official at the Treasury. We will call him Monsieur P——. Freycinet could not believe but that there must be some mistake, and then certain rumours and stories recurred to him. The two people departed, and an hour later he saw Monsieur P—— himself come out of the house and enter his car. He was carrying the walking-stick in his hand. Freycinet had dismissed his cab, and there were none others about. He stopped and pretended to light a cigarette. He heard Monsieur P—— say:

"Drive first to the Treasury."

It was easy to see how the gold of the Republic was leaking away !

In describing this incident Monsieur Tolozan looked as though he were still tingling with the sense of outrage ; then he smiled wistfully, and added :

"As you may imagine, my friend, gold was not the only thing at the back of this affair. As occurs not infrequently in our beloved France, a woman was the agent of a man's destruction. They never arrested Monsieur P——. With one so highly placed a different procedure is usually adopted. He was simply notified that there was to be an interpellation, that certain facts were to be made public. You may remember the unfortunate affair of Monsieur P——. He slept in a small room on the first floor in that house in the Avenue Malakof. One night, a week after these events, he went to bed as usual, but some servant had been tinkering with the top of the stove which heated the room. Disgracefully careless, these servants ! The gas trickled out—hour after hour passed. Poor fellow ! He was found quite dead by his man-servant in the morning. A deplorable ending to a brilliant career . . . deplorable, most deplorable."

"But the woman ?" I ventured to interject.

"Ah, yes, the woman. Truly. . . . As you know, Monsieur P—— was an elderly married

man of irreproachable social character. He had two sons, one in the Army and the other in the Diplomatic Service. This woman suddenly appeared, no one quite knows from where. She was a Spanish woman, not particularly beautiful, but she exercised strange powers over many men. She was a dancer and actress, and went by the name of 'Juanita.' Indeed, she still sings and dances at our best variety theatres. She dances beautifully. If it would not bore you, we might go together this evening to see her. She is dancing at the Casino de Paris."

"That would be delightful. But tell me, Monsieur Tolozan, was this woman in any way responsible for P——'s criminal smuggling of gold?"

"We have every reason to believe so, but we could never bring anything home to her. She is clever, very clever. We know that, although of Spanish stock, she comes originally from that South American State I have mentioned. She has wealthy and influential friends there, and she returns every year. Paris harbours many such women. She is a clever actress on the stage, but an even cleverer one off."

"You have had experience of it?"

"On one occasion, yes."

"When was that?"

"She was the old lady with the two umbrellas."

"But, good Heavens! Tolozan, why haven't they arrested her?"

"Arrested! Tell me, what did she ever do except cross the front with one superfluous umbrella? There's nothing criminal in that. Come, let us go to the Casino. You will be delighted."

THE EVERLASTING CLUB

On the night of November 11th, 1918, seven men sat round a table in an old barn in an obscure spot in Picardy. The news of the Armistice had come through in the morning, and it was apparent that the occupants of the barn were about to celebrate this historic occasion with what means they had at their disposal. It cannot be said that their faces expressed the kind of hysterical elation which was at that moment marking the faces of the revellers in Paris, London, and New York. Their faces certainly expressed relief, but it was relief tempered by the too close contact of late experience. They were like men dazed and a little drugged. Perhaps their environment had something to do with this. The barn was dark, and cold, and draughty. The rain was beating against the roof. A small kerosene lamp, smelling abominably, gave out a feeble suggestion of warmth. The table was lighted with candles stuck into bottles. Perhaps their remoteness from their fellows gave them a feeling that the news was unbelievable, or that it might be contradicted any moment. The War had been on too long,

and the weariness and agony of it was stamped upon their faces.

McLagan and Treadway were *pukka* soldiers of the old army. The other five had joined up early in the War. All had seen much active service. Ross had served a year in Salonica and two years in Mespot. Bessimer had nearly died from dysentery in Egypt. Reid-Andover and Pirbright had been in Russia with Deniken. McLagan, Treadway, and Dawbarn had spent the whole of their time in France and Flanders. The reason of their meeting in this obscure spot is of no consequence. It was in accordance with instructions of certain higher authorities, who were apparently as unprepared for the end of the War as they were for the beginning. It concerned a report that was to be drawn up upon the potentialities for military purposes of certain by-products in local quarries. This was looking far ahead, and now—well, the War was over. The wine having passed, McLagan, who was the senior officer present, rose and said rather huskily :

"Gentlemen, the King!"

They all rose and barked in chorus : "The King!"

They drank the King's health, and then as though the toast had stirred them for the first time at some peculiar angle, making them feel

a little self-conscious, a little ashamed of this surprising emotion, they began to talk more animatedly.

Naturally they talked shop. They talked about "shows" and blunders and guns, and old friends who had gone west. They appeared diffident about discussing the future. They talked as though the War was still going on.

Monsieur Poiret, who owned the ruined farmstead adjoining, had supplied them with fowls and pork and vegetables. Their environment was depressing, but the dinner was adequate. There was an unlimited supply of fairly good red and white wine, and someone had produced a bottle of brandy.

Pirbright and Dawbarn had only arrived that day, and were strangers to the rest. But as the meal progressed, the whole company found they had much in common. This was probably due to the fact that in view of the nature of the enquiry they were called upon to make, they were men of somewhat similar training, experience, and education. In civilian life Pirbright and Bessimer were both metallurgists. Reid-Andover was a fuel expert. Dawbarn had done a lot of scientific research. Ross was a mining engineer. McLagan and Treadway had been in the Geological department of the Indian Army before the War.

Before the meal was finished they were discuss-

ing science and moral philosophy, metaphysics, history, astronomy, sociology, and even religion, the kind of subjects that are not habitually discussed in an officers' mess. The meal being finished, and cleared away, coffee was served and the bottle of brandy opened.

The table they were seated at was a circular one, and so it cannot be said that anyone sat at the head of it. But if there was one man who dominated it by force of personality that man was McLagan.

He was a big man with a long tapering jaw, dark reflective eyes, and black hair. Celt was written all over him. He was nicknamed "The Wringer," and for this reason: he had a terrible grip. When he shook hands he would bring tears into the eyes of the strongest, and he was quite unconscious of it. He wore, moreover, a heavy signet ring on his third finger, and after shaking hands with him many a man would bear the impression of that ring upon his hand for days. He was as animated a listener as he was talker. His eyes wandered eagerly from one face to another as though he were drawing them all together. He presided over them by an implied sense of authority. His colleague, Treadway, sat on his right. He was a typical officer of the modern school, tall, and almost too spare, with close-cropped grey hair, sensitively modelled features, and eyes whose gentleness and kindliness seemed

to belie the profession of arms. He listened, entranced by anything that McLagan said.

Bessimer was the only one of the company whose frame did not seem too lean in that guttering candlelight, and even he looked fit and hard in spite of greater girth, probably the result of taking less exercise than the others. For he had an artificial leg. Ross was a Scotsman, hollow-cheeked, and highly strung. He had a habit of nodding his head constantly when spoken to, and mumbling staccato acquiescence, as though anxious to agree and be done with it. Reid-Andover, with his little clipped moustache and large appealing dark eyes, looked like a small dog with a biscuit on its nose waiting for the words "Paid for!" He had left three fingers of his right hand somewhere in Northern Russia.

Dawbarn was the oldest man present, quite grey and nearly bald. His voice was almost inaudible and his eyes bloodshot, the result of being gassed in Flanders. He made pathetic attempts to be gay and to enter into the various arguments.

Pirbright was a poet. At least, he should have been a poet. He was a man of abstractions, ideas, and visions. He loved to theorize and speculate. He was the only one who talked of the future, and even then with languid detachment. When someone mentioned the Germans,

he muttered : "Poor devils !" and lapsed into a reverie of his own. He was tall and fair, with a large nose, the track of a bullet along his left cheek-bone, and a piece of his left ear missing.

The evening wore on, and the men, huddling round the little kerosene lamp, forgot the cold in the heat of argument. And they talked of life and death and immortality. Each one of them, it was found, believed in a life hereafter, but the manner in which man was to survive, and the conditions of his future state, supplied the matter for a spirited debate. The candles guttered in the bottles, and others were produced. The rain had penetrated the roof and dripped steadily into a pool in the corner. The brandy was finished, but there was still plenty of tobacco and red wine. McLagan did not smoke. He had a habit of leaning forward as he spoke, with his large hands interlocked, and suddenly he would throw back his head, disengage his hands, and emphasize a point by shaking his index finger in the air. He made a Macabre figure sitting there in the ill-lit barn, his dark eyes alight with a kind of malicious excitement.

It was considerably past midnight when someone suggested that it was time to turn in. McLagan had been silent for some time, deep in thought. Suddenly he spoke :

"Gentlemen, don't go for a moment. I want to make a suggestion."

They all regarded him, and he leaned forward, peering into the lamp.

"This is perhaps the most profound day in the history of human life. It is hall-marked for posterity. It is an everlasting day. We have all met under rather queer and exceptional circumstances. We have talked of immortality. We are seven—a good Biblical number. I suggest that in our fashion we immortalize this day."

He stopped, and the others watched him interestedly, expecting him to go on, but he only continued to stare into the stove. At last Bessimer said:

"In what way, McLagan?"

He looked up as though startled, and spoke quietly:

"Looking into the eyes of death every day for four years and a half as we all have, we should go mad if we did not believe in the Everlastingness of things. Let us form a club and demonstrate our faith—just us seven."

He paused again, and Ross said:

"What kind of club, McLagan?"

"An Everlasting Club. Roughly speaking, I propose that we meet on this date once a year in some remote place, like this barn. We have a chairman and a secretary. We conduct it quite formally. We dine perhaps, cooking our own food, for no stranger must be present. Then afterwards we have a debate—some man putting

forward some new theory or record of experience or belief. We discuss it in the manner we talked things over to-night. That is all."

"But how would this be everlasting?" said Ross, nodding his head jerkily. "We shall all die one at a time. Do you mean that when we die another is elected in our place?"

"No," said McLagan. "That would be a negation of the idea. That would be a concession that things are not everlasting."

And then he explained his idea of the Everlasting Club. The others stared at him dumbfounded. The smoke from their pipes trailed between them and away into the dim obscure corners of the barn. A night bird screamed overhead, and McLagan went on talking. Treadway gaped at him like one bewitched. Pirbright forgot to smoke. Bessimer, Dawbarn, and Ross regarded him solemnly. Only Ross appeared frankly cynical, nodding approval and speaking disapproval.

"It's a mad idea, McLagan," he repeated more than once. "Besides, it's dangerous. I wouldn't have anything to do with it."

But when McLagan had finished his explanation, and the room remained silent, except for the water dripping into the pool, Pirbright stood up and said:

"I will join you for one, and I propose McLagan as President of the Everlasting Club."

"And I will join," said Dawbarn, "and I second that proposition."

"And I," whispered Reid-Andover huskily.

"I will join," said Bessimer. "If I do not have to return to Egypt. I see no danger in it, Ross."

"No, no, not for me," said Ross. "I won't touch it."

"Come, come, Ross," said McLagan, "don't spoil our Biblical number. Whatever danger can there be in it? It is only an experiment, an experiment of faith. What else are we likely to extract from this chaos? The War is over, but the troubles of the poor old world are not over. Nevertheless, the whole thing may have been worth while if out of the ashes emerges a knowledge of the Everlasting."

"Knowledge!" gasped Ross. "I had an aunt once—in Edinburgh it was—she had knowledge—she—she—went mad!"

It is a remarkable tribute to the power of personality that McLagan persuaded these other six men—including Ross in the end—to join the astonishing club. Neither at first did there appear to be anything so very astonishing about it. It appeared an ordinary enough social club formed for the purposes of meeting once a year—on Armistice Day—to debate, and discuss, and establish a complete belief in the Everlasting. It did not meet for two years, partly owing to the

fact that Bessimer did go to Egypt and Treadway had to return to India. But Bessimer again got fever in Egypt and had to return to England the following summer. Treadway retired from the Indian Army and came home at about the same time. McLagan persuaded Treadway to take on the secretaryship, and the first meeting was held on November 11th, 1920, in a bungalow up on Leith Hill in Surrey. It was a disused bungalow on an estate that had been left to McLagan by an uncle. The men had all been interested in each other, and felt drawn together by the associations of that historic evening in Picardy, and they fell in with the idea eagerly, all with the exception of Ross, who went down under protest, feeling, however, that he could not let his comrades in.

The first meeting was quite an ordinary and cheery evening. Except for the fact that the bungalow was waterproof, McLagan had tried to reproduce as far as possible the same conditions as those that prevailed in the barn in Picardy. They took food down with them, which he and Treadway cooked. The room was lighted by candles stuck in bottles, and warmed by a stove. Little Reid-Andover created a round of laughter by saying that he only made one stipulation about the club, that was that he didn't have to have his hand shaken by the president every time. They dined gaily, talking of old times and friends, and

drank red wine. When the meal was finished they cleared the table and started the discussion. Pirbright—by previous arrangement—read a brief but thoughtful paper on "The Reasonableness of Re-Incarnation." Bessimer spoke in opposition. Treadway, who wrote shorthand, took down a summary of all the speeches. They were to be copied out and embodied in the archives of the Club. Every member spoke in turn, and McLagan gave a judicial summing up. Forgetting his apprehensions in the excitement of debate, Ross spoke as eagerly as anyone.

There would have been little to distinguish between this meeting of the Everlasting Club and the next, had it not been that early in the following autumn Dawbarn died. He caught a chill playing golf one day in the rain, and, his lungs already affected by poison gas, he contracted double pneumonia and died within three days. This was in October within three weeks of the next meeting of the Everlasting Club. Now what was going to be McLagan's attitude? He had made it pretty clear in his original explanation of the aims of the Club. But how would it operate? Every man had signed a scroll that under no circumstances would he miss a meeting, and that he regarded it in very truth *as an Everlasting Club*. The members were notified, and the meeting took place. It was the turn of Ross to open the discussion.

He arrived late and was very much on edge, and his attention was immediately riveted upon the empty chair that had been set for Dawbarn; the empty chair, and the cutlery and glass, all as though he were actually there. The others occupied their accustomed places. He wanted to talk about Dawbarn, but some curious force restrained him. He found that it was not the thing. You could talk *to Dawbarn, but not about him!*

"Do you or do you not believe in the Everlasting?" a voice seemed to whisper.

Dawbarn's absence was ignored. McLagan was in great spirits, carrying in the fowl which he had roasted himself, making jokes with Reid-Andover, proposing toasts. And all the time Ross's eye kept wandering to the empty chair. He could almost see Dawbarn with close-cropped hair and little bald head leaning over his plate. He could almost hear his wheezy voice: "My dear McLagan, my contention is——"

Treadway calmly read the minutes of the last meeting, as though nothing had happened.

There was something terrible in the sinister assurance of McLagan, and when in the course of the debate that followed he suddenly turned to the empty chair and said:

"You will remember that at our last meeting, Dawbarn, you referred to the Absolute——" Ross wanted to cry out. He could not concen-

trate. Pirbright was also obviously overwrought, but the others had succumbed to the spell of their chief. They carried on the discussion with spirit and enthusiasm. The Everlasting Club survived its first test.

In chronicling the activities of this remarkable Club, one must make allowances for the unusual nature of its mental composition, partly sentimental, partly ironic, partly genuinely interested in psychological experiment, and wholly dominated by one strong and dominating personality. The more Ross dreaded the meetings the more keenly did he look forward to them, the more influenced was he by the strange character of McLagan. Each meeting was like an entirely novel experience, and productive of stimulating thought. It was like an adventure on some uncharted island.

There were two meetings held around the empty chair of Dawbarn, and then an even greater disaster befell the Club. Treadway was killed in Ireland, and Bessimer died from blood-poisoning.

"That will leave four of us," Ross reflected shudderingly. "Three empty chairs!"

The contemplation of three empty chairs seemed less disturbing than the cold certainty of some ultimate and inevitable tragedy. Ross was the youngest member of the Club, but his heart was weak. When the four foregathered at the next meeting, his mind wavered between the

horror of two alternate visions. Perhaps next year his chair would be empty, and still McLagan would be addressing him. "You will remember, my dear Ross, that last year you contended——" Would he be listening? Would he see the bubbles in the wine poured out for him? . . . but there was a horror that he dreaded more than that. He felt it coming, that inevitable fate—to be the last to prove the Everlasting. The years passed and Pirbright died.

And then Reid-Andover, Ross, and McLagan met and they looked into each other's eyes without expressing the thoughts that lay behind them. Four empty chairs! and Reid-Andover, who was now the secretary, quickly read the minutes of the last meeting. The records of the Club now formed quite a volume, and contained matter that was in the nature of revelation, sacred to the members alone. Nothing disturbed the equanimity of McLagan. He was more assured than ever. Only his dark eyes searched the faces of the other two, as though the only danger might lurk there.

The time had come when certain things had got to be said, and it was McLagan's mission to say them. He leaned across the table and gripped the hands of the other two men in his.

"Listen, you fellows," he said, "remember Treadway and Bessimer both went the same year. It's possible two of us might go this. Let us

swear, whoever is left of us three, that he will see this through to the end. This is an Everlasting Club. Swear! Swear!"

"God! I hope it won't be me," said Reid-Andover, "but I swear."

"I swear, too," said Ross, his voice sounding faint and distant.

"I swear," said McLagan firmly.

Reid-Andover had his wish gratified with dramatic suddenness, for he was drowned the following autumn off the West Coast of Scotland, his sailing-boat capsizing in a sudden gale.

"Now there's only McLagan," thought Ross, when he heard the news. "I knew this would be. It was predestined. If only I could die!"

He thought of going abroad, or writing to McLagan to say he couldn't face it. But the more he desired to escape the closer he felt bound to his obligations. He had promised. Besides, the thought of betraying McLagan brought beads of perspiration to his brow. It was he who held the book when they next met, and read the minutes with as much control as he could display. Five empty chairs! and McLagan never so buoyant. He had extended his spiritual adventures. He had much to say, and there was much to be entered in the book.

"On that night, Ross, in the barn at La Villanay, we little thought we should get as far as this . . ."

He seized Ross's hand once more in his strong grip.

"One of us, Ross, will be the last. Swear on your honour for the last time perhaps, that if it is you who are left you will see this thing through."

"I shall be the last," Ross replied hoarsely. "I feel it. It's inevitable. I've known it from the first."

"Swear then!"

"Yes, yes, I swear . . . I swear."

They closed up the bungalow and left it for a year. And the next year they met again. Ross had aged. His face was thin and drawn, his expression preoccupied. He felt ill and overwrought. They went through the usual formalities, lighting the candles, cooking a modest meal, setting the table for the seven. They read the book, and added to it.

A voice seemed to whisper to Ross: "I shall never see McLagan again. But perhaps before the year is out I, too, shall have gone."

They took the same vows over the book as before. As they were parting McLagan said:

"Queer that the only thing the Great War has perpetuated is—the Unknown. It is as though human society had reacted to the clamour of its idols. In our hearts we preserve the conviction of unknown faiths. In our temples we bury the—

Unknown Soldier. It is like starting all over again in our search for the Everlasting.''

One night in the late summer McLagan was found dead in bed in an hotel at Deauville. There was a certain amount of mystery concerning his death. The tap of a gas-stove was turned on a fraction of an inch, but whether this was accidental or intentional no one could say. Death from misadventure was recorded. Ross heard the news with equanimity. He was fully prepared for it. What concerned him the more was the state of his own health. He consulted a specialist, who affirmed that the condition of his heart was serious. He should have a long and complete rest.

''Perhaps I will a little later on,'' he said. To himself he thought:

''I will not believe that McLagan ran away. He was not a coward. In any case, I am under my vow.''

October came and went, and the yellow leaves vanished on the wind, dismantling the stage for the bleak and sombre entrance of November. Ross checked the procession of eleven days, wherein leaden skies, fog, rain, and darkness mingled in indivisible proportion. When the eleventh day dawned, he thought to himself: ''And to think that it was this day so many years ago when the world went nearly mad with joy!

Where is it all gone, the sense of relief, the spirit of brotherhood and forgiveness, that illumined the face of humanity for twelve brief hours?''

Of the task before him he felt little apprehension. His mind had grown accustomed to it, and was more occupied with abstract problems than with concrete fears. He filled a despatch case with the records of the Everlasting Club. He took wine with him and a little food and set off for the bungalow in the hills. It was pitch dark long before he got there.

He thrust the key into the rusty lock and stumbled in. He struck matches and lighted the candles and the stove. He set the table, and placed the seven chairs in position. He hummed to himself as he grilled a small piece of steak. The mist drifted in between the crevices of the windows and the door. The room seemed unnaturally dark. He drank two glasses of the red wine, and when he had eaten as much of the steak as he could, he stood up and said:

"Gentlemen, the King!''

He gulped the wine and glanced at the six empty chairs. There they all seemed to be, watching him. Dawbarn and Pirbright, little Reid-Andover, the solemn Bessimer, Treadway, elegant and urbane, and more insistent than all—McLagan. He could almost hear McLagan's sardonic laugh, and see the dark eyes checking his movements.

"Gentlemen, the Everlasting Club!"

He drank this second toast in grim silence. The boards creaked, and he thought he heard a mouse or rat gnawing in the wainscotting.

He read the minutes of the last meeting, stressing to the full the balanced logic and the argument as promulgated by the president. He gave a brief summary of his own comments. Then he said:

"Is it your wish, gentlemen, that these minutes be passed?"

He glanced round the table and accepted the uncanny silence as consent. He signed them, and then rose once more to open the last debate. He spoke precisely as though all the other members were present. He struggled to concentrate on the abstraction of their united experiences. Once he thought he heard rain dripping into a pool in a corner of the room, and that he—and they—were back once more in the barn at La Villanay on Armistice night. He felt a sudden desire to scream. He wanted to scream into the growing obscurity across the table to McLagan:

"You fool! . . . You fool! . . . don't you know it yet? There's no such thing as the Everlasting. Everything changes."

He gazed wild-eyed at McLagan's chair, and a cold fear settled on his heart.

He pulled himself upright, and muttered:

"All right, McLagan, all right. I promised."

He struggled on till the candles guttered in the

bottles and the stove went out. Suddenly he threw himself forward and stretched his right arm out in the direction of McLagan's chair.

* * * * *

A gardener on the estate found him next morning lying face downwards on the table, his right arm stretched out. And the gardener noticed that the fingers of his hand were pressed closely together, as though they had been held in a powerful grip, and on two of the fingers was a mark that might have been indented by a metal ring. By his side were the charred remnants of a book.

THE END